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Women Ex-Combatants and Peacebuilding in Sierra Leone

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KNNEMI002

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the award of the
degree of Master of Philosophy in Justice and Transformation Studies

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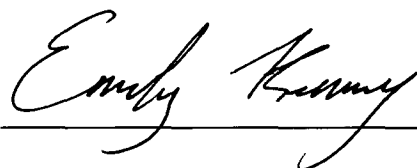
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Abstract

Women combatants played a major role in the conflict in Sierra Leone which raged from 1991 to 2001. They formed an estimated 10 to 30 percent of all combatants, and performed services integral to the perpetuation of the conflict. Nonetheless, at the conclusion of the conflict, these women seemed to become invisible, and were largely absent from two of the major peacebuilding mechanisms in the country: the demobilization, disarmament and reintegration (DDR) program and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC). This thesis uses a gender analysis to investigate the hypotheses that women ex-combatants were overlooked by DDR and the TRC because the mechanisms employed a simplistic and androcentric definition of a 'combatant,' and because women ex-combatants were not seen as critical participants in creating sustainable peace. The analysis of the mechanisms is based on reports from the Sierra Leone government, the TRC, independent researchers, local civil society groups and international human rights organizations.

This thesis also examines women's participation in the conflict in Sierra Leone and their nearly complete absence from peace negotiations. In addition, the thesis investigates the various linkages that can be made between DDR programs and truth commissions, particularly as they relate to the participation of women. It also examines several of the terms critical to its analysis, including 'victim', 'perpetrator', 'combatant' and 'peacebuilding'.

This thesis offers a window for fellow researchers to view how gender insensitivity and exclusion feature in peacebuilding and shows how gender-blindness gives rise to, and reproduces, inequality. Further, it shows the destructive effects that this inequality has for both women and men, and sustainable peace and development in a post-conflict nation. The thesis concludes with suggestions for future research in the field, recommendations for policy advances, and potential areas for cooperation between DDR programs and TRCs.

Table of Contents

<i>Acronyms</i>	iv
<i>Map of Sierra Leone</i>	vi
Chapter One: Introduction	1
<i>Rationale</i>	1
<i>Introduction</i>	2
<i>Overview of the Thesis</i>	3
Chapter One	3
Chapter Two	3
Chapter Three	4
Chapter Four	5
Chapter Five	5
<i>Methodology</i>	6
<i>Limitations</i>	6
<i>Introduction to the Conceptual Themes</i>	7
Women in Conflict: Myth and Reality	7
What is a 'Combatant'?	9
'Victim' or 'Perpetrator'?	10
Peacebuilding	13
Demobilization, Disarmament and Reintegration	15
Transitional Justice	17
Linking DDR and Transitional Justice	19
Chapter Two: Women in Conflict and Peace in Sierra Leone	21
<i>Prelude to a Conflict</i>	21
<i>The Conflict</i>	25
The Revolutionary United Front	27
The Sierra Leone Army	29
The Civil Defense Forces	29
The Armed Forces Revolutionary Council	30
The West Side Boys	31
Peacekeeping Forces	32
Overall Findings	32
<i>Women and Peacebuilding in Sierra Leone</i>	33
Peace Activism	33
Women and the Peace Negotiations	34
Chapter Three: Women Ex-Combatants and DDR	37
<i>DDR in Sierra Leone</i>	37
<i>Women Combatants and DDR</i>	39
Ownership of a Firearm	41
Security at the Cantonment Facilities	42
Over-Classification	42
Misconceptions	43
Cultural Barriers	44
<i>The Gendered Effects of DDR in Sierra Leone</i>	45
<i>Exclusion of Women in the Greater African Context</i>	48

Mozambique	48
Liberia.....	50
<i>Conclusions</i>	52
Chapter Four: Women Ex-Combatants and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission	53
<i>The Truth Commission in a Theoretical and Historical Global Context</i>	<i>53</i>
Understanding the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission	55
Gender and the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission	56
<i>The Sierra Leone Truth and Reconciliation Commission.....</i>	<i>58</i>
Gender and the Sierra Leone Truth and Reconciliation Commission	59
<i>Women Ex-Combatants and the Sierra Leone TRC.....</i>	<i>63</i>
Complex Identities: Blurring the Line between ‘Victim’ and ‘Perpetrator’.....	64
Prioritizing ‘Victims’	66
The Feminine Ideal as a Nation-building Tool	68
The Potential Contributions of Women Ex-Combatants	69
<i>Conclusions</i>	70
Chapter Five: Conclusions and Recommendations	72
<i>Recommendations for Further Research and Analysis.....</i>	<i>72</i>
<i>Recommendations for Policy Advances.....</i>	<i>73</i>
Recommendations: Women Ex-Combatants and DDR.....	74
Recommendations: Women Ex-combatants and Truth Commissions	74
<i>Linking DDR and the TRC.....</i>	<i>76</i>
<i>Conclusions</i>	77
Bibliography.....	79

Acronyms

AMODEG	Associação des Moçambicana dos Desmobilizados da Guerra (Association of Former Soldiers)
AFRC	Armed Forces Revolutionary Council
APC	All People's Congress
CDF	Civil Defense Forces
DDR	Demobilization, disarmament and reintegration
ECOMOG	Economic Community of West African States Monitoring Group
FGC	Female genital cutting
FGM	Female genital mutilation
HRVC	Human Rights Violations Committee
ICTJ	International Center for Transitional Justice
IDDRS	Integrated Demobilization, Disarmament, and Reintegration Standards
NCDDR	National Commission on Demobilization, Disarmament, and Reintegration
NOW	National Organisation for Women
PRIDE	Post-conflict Reintegration Initiative for Development and Empowerment
RUF	Revolutionary United Forces
SATRC	South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission
SBU	Small Boys Unit
SCSL	Special Court for Sierra Leone
SGU	Small Girls Unit
SLA	Sierra Leone Army
SLAUW	Sierra Leone Association of University Women
SLMP	Sierra Leone Movement for Peace

SLPP	Sierra Leone People's Party
SLTRC	Sierra Leone Truth and Reconciliation Commission
SLWM	Sierra Leone Women's Movement
TRC	(Sierra Leone) Truth and Reconciliation Commission
UNAMSIL	United Nations Assistance Mission to Sierra Leone
UNIFEM	United Nations Development Fund for Women
UNOMSIL	United Nations Observer Mission to Sierra Leone
WACS	Women's Auxiliary Corps
WAND	Women's Association for National Development
WIPNET	Women in Peacebuilding Network

Map of Sierra Leone¹



¹ International Crisis Group, Retrieved 28 January 2008 from <http://www.crisisgroup.org/home/index.cfm?id=1391>.

Chapter One: Introduction

Rationale

Why write a thesis that focuses on women combatants – the women who perpetuate conflict, many of whom have themselves have committed egregious violations of human rights? It would seem counterintuitive to hope that a thesis that focuses on women as combatants could contribute constructively to feminist scholarship on women in peacebuilding. However, the examples and arguments presented in this thesis will show the complexity of these women's lives and illustrate how their recognition as active participants in conflict is critical to the success of peacebuilding endeavors. Scholarship on women living in conflict situations must not assume that women play a passive role in conflict. Such simplistic views about women's experiences deny them their agency and obscure their actual constructive contributions to peacebuilding activities.

This thesis should not be misconstrued as an attempt to downplay the fact that women suffer and are in many ways victimized by conflicts, or to deny women the attention and resources they rightfully deserve as victims and the bearers of human rights. However, consigning women solely to the role of victim without considering their agency in the conflict severely curtails the effectiveness of peacebuilding endeavors. Without engaging women ex-combatants as a critical peacebuilding resource, reconciliation and peace cannot be sustained. Ideally, women in conflict should be recognized as being many things: powerless victims, peace advocates, perpetrators of conflict and actors in their own right.

This thesis offers a window for fellow researchers to view how gender insensitivity and exclusion feature in peacebuilding. As with most research that uses a gender analysis, the thesis will show how gender-blindness gives rise to, and reproduces, inequality. Further, it will show the destructive effects that this inequality has for both women and men, and sustainable peace and development in a post-conflict nation. Although the thesis focuses on the effects of gender-blindness in peacebuilding, the analysis is also useful for research that examines gender-blindness in any field.

Introduction

This thesis focuses on the experiences of women ex-combatants in Sierra Leone in peacebuilding mechanisms, specifically the demobilization, disarmament and reintegration (DDR) process and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC). Women in Sierra Leone were very active in perpetuating the ten-year conflict that raged there from 1991 to 2001. Chris Coulter argued that “those women who were thought of as abducted women, or simply camp followers, in Sierra Leone... have actually formed the backbone of the rebel forces”². According to Dyan Mazurana and Susan MacKay, “They [women and girls] are used to carry out the most violent attacks, which tear the fabric of their communities and nations. They fight and are killed”³. Women formed an estimated 10 to 30 percent of the rebel forces during the conflict. However, women represented only 6.5 percent of those who went through the official DDR program (1997-2001).⁴ The final report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Sierra Leone (2002-2007) briefly mentions women’s actions as combatants. The Commission cautioned that it, “experienced great difficulties in accessing ex-women combatants or collaborators... society has lost a wonderful opportunity to fully understand the role played by women in the war”⁵. This thesis will examine how and why these Sierra Leonean women combatants were excluded from peacebuilding in the form of DDR and the TRC.

This thesis hypothesizes that women ex-combatants were overlooked by peacebuilding mechanisms through a lack of understanding and interest on the part of those planning and implementing the programs. First, the mechanisms employed a simplistic and androcentric concept of who a ‘combatant’ was and what a ‘combatant’ did during the conflict. Both DDR and the TRC failed to understand a ‘combatant’ as anything other than a gun-carrying male – ignoring the multiple realities women faced in the conflict. Second, even when those planning

² Coulter, C. (2006). *Reconciliation or Revenge: Narratives of Fear and Shame among Female Ex-combatants in Sierra Leone. Being a Bush Wife*. Uppsala, Sweden, Uppsala University. p. 4.

³ MacKay, S. and D. Mazurana (2004). *Where are the Girls? Girls in Fighting Forces in Northern Uganda, Sierra Leone and Mozambique: Their Lives During and After War*. Montreal, International Center for Human Rights and Democratic Governance: 75. p. 117.

⁴ Mazurana, D. and K. Carlson (2004). *From Combat to Community: Women and Girls of Sierra Leone*. S. N. Anderlini, *Women Waging Peace and The Policy Commission*: 46. p. 2.

⁵ Truth and Reconciliation Commission, S. L. (2004). *Witness to Truth: Report of the Sierra Leone Truth and Reconciliation Commission, Volume Three B. Witness to Truth: Report of the Sierra Leone Truth and Reconciliation Commission*. Accra, Ghana, Sierra Leone Truth and Reconciliation Commission. **3B**: 514. Chapter 3, para 430, 405.

and implementing the mechanisms knew about women ex-combatants' existence and special needs, women ex-combatants were not seen as critical factors in creating sustainable peace. Peacebuilding resources were scarce, and the participation of men was viewed as more important than that of women, who were often already 'invisible' to those planning the processes. This lack of understanding and interest led to superficial attempts to reach out to women ex-combatants, and did not provide the special services and protections these women required in order to participate in effective programming.

This thesis also examines another aspect of this lack of understating and interest: the nearly complete absence of women from peace negotiations. In addition, the thesis investigates the various linkages that can be made between DDR and truth commissions, particularly as they relate to the participation of women. It also examines several of the terms critical to its analysis. What does the word 'perpetrator' mean for women? Might there be a better term for the actions and experiences of women combatants in Sierra Leone? What is a woman 'combatant'? Should this term be expanded to include women who serve as nurses, cooks and sex slaves for traditionally defined male combatants? Or should an alternative term be found?

Overview of the Thesis

Chapter One

This chapter introduces the subject matter and case study country. It begins with a discussion of the broad conceptual themes that are featured in the thesis. These themes include the role of women in conflict and post-conflict Sierra Leone and in other conflicts around the globe; understandings of the terms 'combatant', 'perpetrator' and 'victim'; and the evolution and agendas of peacebuilding, DDR and transitional justice, particularly as these topics relate to women. It also examines the link between DDR and transitional justice, and the important role that both processes play in peacebuilding.

Chapter Two

Chapter Two surveys the history of women's roles in pre-conflict, conflict and post-conflict Sierra Leone. This history begins with an analysis of the position and actions of women in the

years leading up to the conflict. It then examines the variety of ways that women were involved in the conflict as victims, combatants and perpetrators (again focusing on the overlap between these terms that occurred for many women). It is also important to frame a context for the armed conflict in terms of the vast array of combatant groups involved, and the varying degrees to which these groups victimized women and incorporated them into their ranks.

Next, Chapter Two focuses on the women who organized and worked for peace in an unofficial, non-governmental capacity – women's peace organizations played an integral role in demanding that the conflict come to an end. Finally, it examines women's participation in formal peace negotiations and women's involvement in the planning of DDR and the TRC. This analysis will show how the exclusion of women from the formal planning and implementation of peacebuilding mechanisms fundamentally compromised women's ability to challenge masculine ideals and institute policies and programs that would properly support women (particularly women ex-combatants) in post-conflict Sierra Leone.

Chapter Three

Chapter Three focuses more specifically on the role that women combatants played in the DDR process that went on in the country from 1997 to 2001. It begins with an overview DDR in Sierra Leone, and the roles that the government and the United Nations played in the design and implementation of DDR programming. It examines the policies that led to the exclusion of the majority of the women who had fought in the conflict in Sierra Leone and examine the numerous cultural stigmas and pressures that discouraged women from participating in DDR. The chapter also includes a discussion of the long-term negative effects that the exclusion of women ex-combatants had on DDR's success as a peacebuilding operation.

Chapter Three also draws on the experiences of women in DDR in Mozambique and Liberia. These other case study countries should serve to further illustrate that women are routinely excluded from peacebuilding, despite their pronounced presence as combatants in many conflicts. These examples also show a progression in the understanding and inclusion of women ex-combatants that provides hope for future DDR programs.

The analysis of DDR in Chapter Three shows how a simple understanding of who a ‘combatant’ was and a lack of interest in the participation of women ex-combatants led to women ex-combatants’ exclusion from the process. DDR deprived women of their general entitlement to participate in the program by reaching out to ‘combatants’ – but only those who fit its masculine definition. It also failed to recognize that women have special needs that are different from men’s, particularly because of women’s dual status as ‘combatant’ *and* ‘victim’.

Chapter Four

Chapter Four focuses on the role of women ex-combatants in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. This chapter begins with an overview of the truth commission as a transitional justice mechanism. It provides a brief history of truth commissions, emphasizing the importance of the South African TRC in this history, which operated from 1996 to 2001. The South African TRC, although far from perfect, has served as the model for the vast majority subsequent of truth commissions, and was largely the basis for that in Sierra Leone. Chapter Four examines the changes made to the South African ‘model’ in Sierra Leone, particularly on its success in making itself more approachable to women victims.

The focus of the chapter is women ex-combatants’ involvement with the TRC, both as victims and perpetrators. The Sierra Leone TRC was afforded a unique opportunity to include many of the women who were excluded from DDR. The chapter examines how and why the TRC largely failed to include women ex-combatants. As with DDR, the TRC showed a lack of understanding for women ex-combatants’ experiences and a lack of interest in their involvement, which resulted in policies that did not encourage their participation. The chapter shows the effects of the exclusion of female ex-combatants on post-conflict reconciliation and the overall goals of peacebuilding.

Chapter Five

Chapter Five draws on the previous chapters to paint a comprehensive picture of the importance of the recognition of women’s diverse roles in conflict. It highlights the missed opportunities for peacebuilding in Sierra Leone, and reiterates the hypothesis that women ex-combatants were

ignored by these peacebuilding mechanisms through a lack of understanding of their roles and interest in their participation. The chapter shares several suggestions for further research and recommendations for how peacebuilding mechanisms might better recognize and include women ex-combatants in their work. The thesis concludes with a discussion of the links between DDR and truth commissions and how a holistic approach to peacebuilding that focuses on cooperation between individual mechanisms might be a potential next step.

Methodology

The methodology for this thesis is an analysis of the literature and research on the conflict and peacebuilding mechanisms in Sierra Leone. It frames and contextualizes existing information on women ex-combatants and their experiences in conflict, DDR and the TRC in a broader, more holistic understanding of ‘peacebuilding’. Existing primary research and secondary writings have focused on combatants, DDR and the TRC, but have rarely examined the connections between the three subjects from a gender perspective.

Too often, analyses of conflict and peacebuilding are conceptually gender-blind, and thus fail to uncover the ways in which gender relations contribute to conflict and peace. The thesis uses a gender analysis to overcome the exclusion of women and girls that is implicit in the existing terminology and in the policies that are blind to gender – and therefore reproduce gender inequality.

Limitations

The available data on women combatants is limited to what the government, courts, truth commissions and human rights NGOs are willing to find and publish. Often, these sources reveal that information about the experiences of women as actors in violent conflict is lacking or nearly absent. This thesis will not attempt to uncover new information about the actions of women as combatants. Instead, it will use the available information, or lack thereof, to support the hypothesis that this information is missing for a reason – that gender-blindness commonly results in the exclusion of women’s experiences, whether in research or in peacebuilding. There is a lack

of available information in a number of areas that this thesis touches upon, including women's participation in specific armed groups during the conflict, and women ex-combatants' experiences with the TRC. Although this lack of information certainly poses a challenge to the research question, in many respects it is also supportive of an important conclusion about the lack of women's participation. The lack of information is a part of the 'problem', but also allows the thesis to add new knowledge to the field, while drawing attention to the role of researchers in change processes.

Introduction to the Conceptual Themes

Women in Conflict: Myth and Reality

For centuries, literature on conflict has focused on the active role that men play in perpetrating acts of violence. Despite increased attention in recent years, women's participation in carrying out violence remains poorly understood and infrequently documented. It is important that those charged with the task of building peace understand the various roles that women play in conflict; studies that only highlight the victimization of women during conflict often subsequently generalize of the needs of women in the post-conflict setting.⁶

Feminist authors such as Elshtain, Enloe, and Goldstein examine the gender binary that leads to the outdated misconception of men as warriors and women as peacemakers.⁷ This conception is deeply rooted in early Western feminist thinking but is still evident in contemporary women's peace movements that idealize women as innately peaceful beings. The belief that conflict is a masculine entity is no longer valid, a fact which Moser and Clark note has led to insufficient

⁶ Pankhurst, D. (2003). "The Sex War and Other Wars: Towards a Feminist Approach to Peacebuilding." *Development in Practice* 13(2 & 3): 154 - 177. p. 167.

⁷ Elshtain, J. B. (1994). Thinking About Women and International Violence. *Women, Gender, and World Politics*. P. R. Beckman and F. D'Amico, Begin and Harvey Pub.: 109-119.

Enloe, C. (2004). All the Men are in the Militias, All the Women are the Victims: The Politics of Masculinity and Femininity in Nationalist Wars. *The Curious Feminist: Searching for Women in a New Age of Empire*, University of California Press.

Goldstein, J. S. (2001). *War and Gender: How Gender Shapes the War System and Vice Versa*. Cambridge, UK, Cambridge University Press.

recognition of women's active participation in conflict.⁸ In her study of African women combatants, Aaronette White described the role that African women played in the liberation armies that fought for political independence from European colonial rule. She also noted that African women have served in government militia and counterinsurgent paramilitary forces during post-independence civil wars. Despite their presence in all of these conflicts as active, powerful agents, their stories are missing from most mainstream histories and analyses of conflict.⁹

Parpart and Marchand continue in this vein, suggesting that the dichotomous distinction between masculine and feminine identities leaves women as powerless, voiceless figures in conflict, destroying their agency.¹⁰ Denying women their agency in a conflict can have vast consequences in the post-conflict setting. Moser and Clark particularly note the devastating effects that this denial has had on the inclusion of women ex-combatants in demobilization campaigns.¹¹ The limited portrayal of women as victims and peacemakers excludes women ex-combatants from peacebuilding mechanisms; this topic is a major focus of this thesis.

In reality, women play a variety of roles in conflict. Women have always played a key role in supporting conflict, either as combatants themselves, or in support of male combatants. Azza Karam noted that, "Even where [women] have not been soldiers of some sort, as half of the world's population (if not more), women form an essential half of society, even in conflict"¹². Meintjes and Goldblatt point out that the perpetration of violence is "not the preserve of men alone", and that women in South Africa were spies, warders, and even torturers during the struggle against apartheid.¹³ One of 72 standing trial at the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda is a woman, Pauline Nyiramasahuko, the former national Minister of Family and

⁸ Moser, C. and F. Clark (2001). Introduction. Victims, Perpetrators or Actors? Gender, Armed Conflict and Political Violence. C. Moser and F. Clark. London, Zed Books. p. 4.

⁹ White, A. (2003). All the Men are Fighting for Freedom, All the Women are Mourning Their Men, But Some of Us Carried Guns: Fanon's Psychological Perspectives on War and African Women Combatants. Boston Consortium Working Paper Series. Boston, Boston Consortium for Gender, Security and Human Rights: 32. p. 4.

¹⁰ Parpart, J. and M. Marchand (2003). Exploding the Canon: introduction/conclusion. Feminism/Postmodernism/Development. J. Parpart and M. Marchand. London, Routledge.

¹¹ Moser, C. and F. Clark (2001). Introduction. Victims, Perpetrators or Actors? Gender, Armed Conflict and Political Violence. C. Moser and F. Clark. London, Zed Books. p. 9.

¹² Karam, A. (2001). "Women in War and Peace-building: the Roads Traversed, the Challenges Ahead." International Feminist Journal of Politics 3-1(April 2001). pp. 2 – 3.

¹³ Goldblatt, B. and S. Meintjes (1996). Gender and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission: A Submission to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

Women's Affairs. Nyiramasahuko faces eleven charges, including genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes. She is the first woman ever to be charged with these crimes in an international court, as well as the first woman ever to be charged with inciting rape as a crime against humanity.¹⁴

The proliferation of small arms and light weapons has also allowed women and children to operate as combatants in the same capacity as men. Modern weapons are easier to use, more portable, and highly affordable. They have changed the ways that wars take place and made them more lethal. According to Vanessa Farr, "In drawing in women and children as both victims *and* perpetrators of deadly aggression, such weapons have forced us to think differently about who properly constitutes an actor and who a victim of armed violence."¹⁵

What is a 'Combatant'?

The United Nations, in its 2006 Integrated DDR Standards, based its definition of a combatant on the definition set out in the Third Geneva Convention:

A combatant is a person who:

- Is a member of a national army or an irregular military organization; or
- Is actively participating in military activities and hostilities; or
- Is involved in recruiting or training military personnel; or
- Holds a command or decision-making position within a national army or an armed organization; or
- Arrived in a host country carrying arms or in military uniform or as part of a military structure; or
- Having arrived in a host country as an ordinary civilian, thereafter assumes, or shows determination to assume, any of the above attributes.¹⁶

This mid-twentieth century definition excludes the types of roles that women are most likely to play in contemporary combat.¹⁷ A traditional conception of soldiers as "men with guns" discriminates against women and girl soldiers who contribute in non-traditional ways – as well as

¹⁴ Landesman, P. (2002). *A Woman's Work*. New York Times. New York.

¹⁵ Farr, V. (2004). "The new war zone: The ubiquitous presence of guns and light weapons has changed the definitions of 'war,' 'victim,' and 'perpetrator'." *Women's Review* February 2004.

¹⁶ (2006). Integrated Demobilization, Disarmament and Reintegration Standards. New York, United Nations: 772. 1.20 p. 4.

¹⁷ However, the IDDRS does allow for the participation of those it classifies as non-combatants including children associated with armed forces and groups; those working in non-combat roles (including women); ex-combatants with disabilities and chronic illnesses; dependants. See Ibid. 2.10, para 4.5.

the men and boys who may also fight un-conventionally.¹⁸ Mazurana and Carlson, in their extensive study of women ex-combatants in Sierra Leone, wrote that the definition of combatant ought to be expanded to incorporate those who were a part of a regular armed force in any capacity, including those who served as cooks, messengers and sex slaves.¹⁹ This broad definition would include the women in Sierra Leone who were formally incorporated into military structures as well as those who supported the troops informally. Of the women ex-combatants interviewed by Mazurana and Carlson, 72 percent identified themselves as cooks; 68 percent as porters; 62 percent as assistants for the sick and wounded; 60 percent as 'wives'; 44 percent as food producers; 40 percent as messengers between rebel camps; 22 percent as spies; 18 percent as communications technicians; and 14 percent as workers in diamond mines for their commanders or captor husbands.²⁰ Although these women's work in the armed forces was critical to the perpetuation of the conflict in Sierra Leone, many of them would not be identified as 'combatants' under the United Nation's outdated definition,

Perhaps one task of future feminist research would be to come up with a term to identify women who act in non-traditional combatant roles. However, as existing feminist research on the topic does use the word 'combatant' to describe these women, this thesis will not create confusion by using an original word. Instead, it will attempt to differentiate between the masculine concept of the term 'combatant' and the broader use of the term, which includes more feminine roles. Unless otherwise specified, this thesis uses the expanded definition of the term, in recognition of the critical role that women played in the conflict in roles not included in the traditional definition of combatant, yet always a part of war.

'Victim' or 'Perpetrator'?

In examining the role of women ex-combatants in the Sierra Leone TRC, one must take into account the distinct line the Commission drew between 'victim' and 'perpetrator'. The TRC final report defined a 'victim' as

¹⁸ MacKay, S. and D. Mazurana (2004). *Where are the Girls? Girls in Fighting Forces in Northern Uganda, Sierra Leone and Mozambique: Their Lives During and After War*. Montreal, International Center for Human Rights and Democratic Governance: 75.p. 114.

¹⁹ Mazurana, D. and K. Carlson (2004). *From Combat to Community: Women and Girls of Sierra Leone*. S. N. Anderlini, *Women Waging Peace and The Policy Commission*: 46. p. 1.

²⁰ *Ibid.* p. 12.

A person... where as a result of acts or omissions that constitute a violation of international human rights and humanitarian law norms, that person suffered harm, including physical or mental injury, emotional suffering, economic loss, or impairment of that person's fundamental legal rights. A 'victim' may also be a dependant or a member of the immediate family or household of the direct victim as well as a person who, in intervening to assist a victim or prevent the occurrence of further violations, has suffered physical, mental or economic harm.²¹

A 'perpetrator' was defined as a person who was "responsible for violations of human rights and international humanitarian law". More specifically, "Perpetrators may be public officials or members of quasi-governmental or private armed groups with any kind of link to the State, or of non-governmental armed movements having the status of belligerents. Perpetrators may be the direct offenders, or they may be accomplices"²².

Of the many tasks that the TRC was assigned, one was to gather testimonies of 'victims' and 'perpetrators' to create a comprehensive history of the conflict and promote reconciliation and healing.²³ The perpetrator/victim language that the Commission used to speak about testimonies assumed that those who wished to testify would fall neatly into one of the two categories. However, the women who acted as combatants in the conflict in Sierra Leone were almost always both 'victims' and 'perpetrators' of violence.

Isha Dyfan reported to the United Nations in 2003 that over 12,000 girls were forced into armed service during the conflict, thus immediately defining them as victims in the conflict.²⁴ These women and girls endured numerous other human rights violations, as recounted in the final report of the Sierra Leone TRC:

The Commission finds that all of the armed groups pursued a deliberate strategy of targeting women and young girls between the ages of 13 and 22, abducting them for the sole purpose of keeping them under their control, exercising rights of ownership over them and exploiting their vulnerability, *coercing them into becoming combatants*, using them as sexual slaves, sexually violating them and using them for

²¹ Truth and Reconciliation Commission, S. L. (2004). Witness to Truth: Report of the Sierra Leone Truth and Reconciliation Commission, Volume One. Witness to Truth: Report of the Sierra Leone Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Accra, Ghana, Sierra Leone Truth and Reconciliation Commission. 1: 247. Chapter 3, para 42

²² Ibid. Chapter 3 paras 43 and 45.

²³ Ibid. Chapter 1, para 3.1.

²⁴ Dyfan, I (2003). "Peace Agreements as a Means for Promoting Gender Equality and Ensuring Participation of Women." New York, United Nations. UNDOC EGM/PEACE/2003/EP.5.

the purposes of forced labour and servicing the needs of the armed group.²⁵ (Italics added for emphasis)

Further, the report noted that, “While majority of the women were victims... some often took on the role of perpetrator and/or collaborator usually out of conviction and/or the need to survive”²⁶. The report lists several of the women who served high in the chain of command in the Armed Forces Revolutionary Council (AFRC) and Revolutionary United Front (RUF). It stated that women killed with the same brutality as men, and included an excerpt of an interview with a woman ‘perpetrator’:

During the first attack in Masiaka... he took me along with him. When we reached their base, around Bo, inside a forest, I was injected inside my mouth on my last tooth. That injection made me to become fearless. I was not afraid to do anything when we were in the front. I was the one who always led the group sometimes... When others were afraid, I will go and offend government troops and later come and inform them and we would go and attack, that is why I was called Cause Trouble. I took part in many attacks in this country, including the one in Freetown. I do harassed people for their goods and threatened to kill them if they don’t give me what I am demanding for (sic).²⁷

The report also included paragraphs on women’s roles as ‘collaborators’ with armed groups, by providing them food and services, and by acting as spies.²⁸

The TRC final report clearly shows that women combatants were both victims and perpetrators in the conflict, and admits that it had serious difficulty in finding women combatants willing to testify. Chapter Four will further examine the TRC’s problematic definitions of ‘victim’ and ‘perpetrator’, and the ways in which this binary excluded and obscured the dual experiences of women ex-combatants. This thesis will use the Sierra Leone TRC’s definitions of ‘perpetrator’ and ‘victim’, recognizing that women ex-combatants constantly crossed the line between the two.

²⁵ Truth and Reconciliation Commission, S. L. (2004). *Witness to Truth: Report of the Sierra Leone Truth and Reconciliation Commission, Volume Three B. Witness to Truth: Report of the Sierra Leone Truth and Reconciliation Commission*. Accra, Ghana, Sierra Leone Truth and Reconciliation Commission. **3B**: 514. Chapter 3, para 209.

²⁶ Ibid. Chapter 3, para 9.

²⁷ Marie Kargbo, 3/061/3865 (Old Police Barracks, Kambia: 4 February 2003), in Ibid. Chapter 3, para 387.

²⁸ Ibid. Chapter 3, para 397.

Peacebuilding

In recent years, 'peacebuilding' has become a buzzword in the lexicon of peace and development scholars and practitioners, representing a holistic approach to creating sustainable peace in post-conflict societies. This holistic approach, though, came about after many years of thinking about peace and security as separate from development issues. During the Cold War, the promotion of socioeconomic development was largely left up to sovereign nation-states, supported by international Bretton Woods Agreement institutions such as the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, and the socio-economic agencies of the United Nations. In contrast, peace and security issues were dominated by large international military organizations, such as the North Atlantic Treaty Organization and the Warsaw Pact. These groups maintained control over the majority of economic and human resources for peace and security initiatives.²⁹

It was only at the end of the Cold War that international agencies began to rethink the connection between peace and development, and the term 'peacebuilding' was coined.³⁰ In 1992, UN Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali defined peacebuilding as "action to identify and support structures which will tend to strengthen and solidify peace in order to avoid a relapse into conflict"³¹. Peacebuilding lies at the nexus of development initiatives and peace initiatives, as it is the process by which a nation creates the conditions for sustainable peace in its transition from conflict. In 1998, Secretary-General Kofi Annan stated that peacebuilding should create "conditions for resumed development"³². Peacebuilding seeks to address the root causes of conflict, consolidate peace, and rebuild the community in a way that reduces its potential for future conflict.³³ The process includes a number of tools and mechanisms which help the new nation to cope with its past and begin to make progress towards peace and stability.

²⁹ Tschirgi, N. (2003). Peacebuilding as the Link between Security and Development: Is the Window of Opportunity Closing? Strengthening the Security-Development Nexus: Conflict, Peace and Development in the 21st Century. New York, International Peace Academy. p. 1.

³⁰ Mazurana, D. and K. Carlson (2004). From Combat to Community: Women and Girls of Sierra Leone. S. N. Anderlini, Women Waging Peace and The Policy Commission: 46. p. 3.

³¹ Boutros Boutros-Ghali (1992). *An Agenda for Peace, Preventive Diplomacy, Peacemaking and Peace-keeping*. Report of the Secretary-General Pursuant to the Statement Adopted by the Summit Meeting of the Security Council on 31 January 1992, UN Doc A/47/277-S/24111, 17 June 1992. paragraph 21.

³² Kofi Annan (1998). The Causes of Conflict and the Promotion of Durable Peace in Africa, Report of the Secretary-General to the UN Security Council, UN Doc A/52/871-S/1998/318, 16 April 1998. paragraph 63.

³³ Tschirgi, N. (2003). Peacebuilding as the Link between Security and Development: Is the Window of Opportunity Closing? Strengthening the Security-Development Nexus: Conflict, Peace and Development in the 21st Century. New York, International Peace Academy. p. 2.

For the purposes of this thesis, ‘peacebuilding’ will include demobilization, disarmament and reintegration campaigns and transitional justice mechanisms, such as a truth commission, which provide accountability for past human rights abuses and encourage community reconciliation. It must be recognized that ‘peacebuilding’ is a loosely defined term. Its scope and mechanisms are often contested and can change with the context in an individual country. The further discussion of DDR and transitional justice in the thesis will show how both processes are critical to the goals of peacebuilding – creating sustainable peace and the conditions for resumed development – and are thus deserving of inclusion in its definition.

In recent years, the role of gender in peacebuilding has come to the forefront of thought on sustainable peace and development. Feminist critics of peacebuilding suggest that ‘peace’ and ‘security’ are highly gendered terms, and that women’s understandings are rarely taken into consideration by the national governments and international organizations that plan and implement peacebuilding activities.³⁴ In 2000, the United Nations Security Council passed Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security. Resolution 1325 marked a turning point in the recognition of the importance of gender in peacebuilding activities. The Resolution recognizes that women’s visibility in domestic and international politics and organizations is crucial to creating balanced and successful programming.

Resolution 1325 calls for gender-aware peacekeeping initiatives, specifically mentioning DDR and transitional justice. Women must have informed and active participation in disarmament exercises, and should be able to carry out their post-conflict reconstruction activities without the threat of violence, particularly sexual violence. In Paragraph 13, the resolution encourages “all those planning demobilization, disarmament and reintegration to consider the different needs of male and female combatants and to take into account the needs of their dependents”³⁵. In Paragraph 11 the Security Council urges nations to end impunity for gender crimes and prosecute

³⁴ African Gender Institute (2007). Unpublished notes from the working meeting “Gender and Militarism”. Cape Town, October 2007.

³⁵ United Nations Security Council (2000). *Resolution 1325*. New York, United Nations. para. 13.

those responsible for using sexual abuse as a weapon of war, stating that nations should attempt to “prosecute those responsible for sexual violence against women and girls”³⁶.

For the purposes of this thesis, DDR and transitional justice both fall under the category of ‘peacebuilding mechanism’, as both contribute directly to the establishment and maintenance of peace in post-conflict countries. This thesis examines the gender implications of two peacebuilding mechanisms, specifically as they relate to the experiences of women ex-combatants in Sierra Leone.

Demobilization, Disarmament and Reintegration

One of the most important means by which a country builds a culture of peace is to transform the military structures that exist within its borders. Demobilization, disarmament and reintegration programs are designed to do just this. Since the late 1980s, the United Nations has assisted with or led DDR programs in many nations transitioning out of conflict. The UN states that the ultimate goal of DDR is “to contribute to security and stability in post-conflict environments so that recovery and development can begin”³⁷. As its name suggests, DDR involves disarming the ex-combatants, removing them from existing military structures, and providing them with the training necessary to become productive members of their communities and a peaceful nation. The process operates on many levels, incorporating political, military, humanitarian, and socio-economic elements.

The UN’s DDR programming typically begins with an appeal on behalf of a post-conflict nation to those involved in the conflict to come forward and turn in their arms. Then, these former combatants remain in a cantonment facility for approximately two weeks to be trained on how to reintegrate back into their communities as non-combatants. In exchange for participation, the ex-combatants usually receive a cash reward. In Liberia, for example, this was \$75 US at registration, and another \$75 upon completion of the reintegration training.³⁸ Long-term

³⁶ Ibid, para. 11.

³⁷ (2006). Integrated Demobilization, Disarmament and Reintegration Standards. New York, United Nations: 772.1.10 p. 1.

³⁸ Specht, I. (2006). Red Shoes: Experiences of Girl-Combatants in Liberia. Geneva, International Labour Office Programme on Crisis Response and Reconstruction: 135. p. 85.

reintegration strategies continue after the ex-combatants are discharged from the on-site DDR process. These strategies include writing a new constitution, forming new political parties and holding elections.³⁹

Conflict and militarization have always been highly gendered arenas, and the UN's experience with DDR has been no exception. In its earliest DDR programs, including that in Sierra Leone, the UN had a "one-man, one-gun" eligibility policy as an invitation to participate in DDR; every former combatant with a weapon was invited to turn it in and attend programming. By its very nature, the UN's definition of 'combatant' excluded those who did not have weapons to turn in: the women who had served in the military as nurses, cooks and sex workers or slaves. It also excluded the female dependents of male combatants. DDR in its earliest forms was so conspicuous in its exclusion of women that it inspired the feminist movement to take serious action.

In 2000, with the ratification of Security Council Resolution 1325, DDR processes were required to take into account the needs of female combatants and their dependents. Following much scrutiny and revision, the UN now invites five categories of people who are eligible to participate in DDR processes: male and female adult combatants; children associated with armed forces and groups; those working in non-combat roles (including women); ex-combatants with disabilities and chronic illnesses; and dependants.⁴⁰ The UN's development fund for women, UNIFEM has a website specifically designated as a forum for the discussion and study of gender in DDR⁴¹, and the feminist movement continues to generate literature on women's role in peacebuilding and the importance of including a gender perspective in the peacebuilding processes.

Despite the attention that gender has received in the recent planning and implementation of DDR processes, the UN continues to face serious problems attracting female participants. These issues

³⁹ For comprehensive information on DDR programming, see: United Nations (2006). "Integrated Demobilization Disarmament and Reintegration Standards (IDDRS)". New York, United Nations.

⁴⁰ (2006). Integrated Demobilization, Disarmament and Reintegration Standards. New York, United Nations: 772. 2.10 p. 7.

⁴¹ . "Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR)." Retrieved 28 January 2008, from <http://www.womenwarpeace.org/node/4>.

surrounding female participation, as experienced in Sierra Leone, will be the focus of Chapter Three.

Transitional Justice

‘Transitional justice’ refers to the approaches that countries use to reckon with their unique histories of widespread human rights abuse or social trauma. A society that is emerging from violent conflict or oppression, transitioning into a new political dispensation that respects human rights and the rule of law, may use a variety of approaches to confront its difficult past.

Approaches to transitional justice can be judicial or non-judicial, but are all based on a common understanding and respect for human rights. Furthermore, transitional justice mechanisms consistently take a victim-centered approach.⁴² The primary tools of transitional justice are the following:

- *Truth telling* – Truth telling seeks to uncover historical truths and determine the full extent and nature of past human rights abuses. Mechanisms include national or international truth commissions, historical inquiries, and the collection and compilation of victims’ testimonies or oral histories. Chapter Four will focus on a truth telling mechanism, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Sierra Leone.
- *Prosecutions* – Prosecutions seek to provide accountability for human rights abuses by trying those responsible for them. Prosecutions can include domestic or international trials and tribunals, as well as hybrid courts. The Special Court for Sierra Leone is a hybrid tribunal that the United Nations created for the international community to work in partnership with Sierra Leone to try those most responsible for human rights violations during the conflict. Chapter Four will also include further information about the Special Court.
- *Reparations* – Reparations may be provided to victims of human rights violations for the purposes of compensation, restitution or rehabilitation. Reparations may be monetary or symbolic, such as a state apology. The Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Sierra Leone includes a chapter on reparations, which recommended a reparations policy that would encompass, “a broader sense of justice that goes beyond individual satisfaction and includes recognition for the harm suffered”⁴³. In October 2007 the National Commission for Social Action was charged with the task of implementing the Sierra Leone TRC’s recommendations, including the reparations policy.⁴⁴
- *Institutional Reform* – Transitioning nations may seek to reform institutions with histories

⁴² (2006). "What is Transitional Justice?" Retrieved 28 January 2008, from www.ictj.org/en/tj/.

⁴³ Truth and Reconciliation Commission, S. L. (2004). Witness to Truth: Report of the Sierra Leone Truth and Reconciliation Commission, Volume Two. *Witness to Truth: Report of the Sierra Leone Truth and Reconciliation Commission*. Accra, Ghana, Sierra Leone Truth and Reconciliation Commission. 2: 503. Chapter 4, para. 5.

⁴⁴ Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation (2007). “Sierra Leone Truth and Reconciliation Commission”. *Justice in Perspective*. http://www.justiceinperspective.org.za/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=30&Itemid=66.

of human rights abuse, in order to create civic trust in government institutions and prevent abuses from occurring in the future. Such institutions usually include the security sector and police force, but may also include education, health care and other public services. Institutional policies are reformed, and vetting is performed to rid agencies of corrupt officials.

Transitional justice seeks to provide citizens with a sense of justice and accountability, create the foundations for reconciliation, and encourage a common understanding of the past. Furthermore, transitional justice should provide a renewed sense of civic trust, encourage social reconstruction, and prevent future human rights abuses.

Historically, 'transitional justice' is a very young concept, with its roots in the post-World War II Nuremburg Trials of former Nazis. In the past several decades the concept has faced harsh criticism from feminists. In their article on a potential feminist theory of transitional justice, Christine Bell and Catherine O'Rourke write, "Both the legal standards which transitional justice mechanisms draw on, and the processes by which they have been designed, have tended to be exclusionary of women"⁴⁵. Further, they assert that the use of transitional justice mechanisms is negotiated by state and non-state protagonists involved in the conflict and by international mediators, all of whom are overwhelmingly male"⁴⁶. Women often have little involvement in the design and work of transitional justice mechanisms.

Many feminists insist that transitional justice is inherently flawed, and unable to accomplish transformative gender goals. They question whether "adding gender" to transitional justice is enough to make it effective in creating security and achieving reconciliation for women.⁴⁷ Others insist that feminist work has made improvements in the ways transitional justice engages with gender and the positive outcomes it can have for gender relations.⁴⁸ Positive examples of change include the formal incorporation of gender crimes into the mandates of prosecutorial bodies and truth commissions, as is the case for the Special Court for Sierra Leone and the Sierra Leone Truth and Reconciliation Commission.⁴⁹ Although feminists disagree about the necessity

⁴⁵ Bell, C. and C. O'Rourke (2007). "Does Feminism Need a Theory of Transitional Justice? An Introductory Essay." *The International Journal of Transitional Justice* 1: 23-44. p. 24.

⁴⁶ Ibid. p. 25.

⁴⁷ Ibid. p. 26.

⁴⁸ Ibid. p. 29.

⁴⁹ Ibid. pp. 27-28.

of radical change, this thesis takes the position that transitional justice mechanisms must continue to evolve if they are ever to achieve gender transformative goals.

Linking DDR and Transitional Justice

DDR and transitional justice are both components of a successful transition from conflict and oppression to peace and democracy. Their primary similarity is that they both seek to lay the foundations for sustainable peace and development.⁵⁰ For the purposes of this thesis, however, it is particularly important to note other similarities between these peacebuilding mechanisms. Both DDR and transitional justice mechanisms work with ex-combatants. Combatants play an obvious role in DDR, but are also an important part of transitional justice mechanisms, as these mechanisms attempt to provide accountability for human rights abuses, often perpetrated by ex-combatants.

Frequently, combatants are enticed to participate in DDR by the promise of amnesty for crimes committed during the conflict, freeing them from prosecution. This amnesty is usually a part of the negotiated settlement at the end of the conflict, and various factions' willingness to participate in the DDR is contingent upon an amnesty clause in the political agreement. This was the case in Sierra Leone, where the Lomé Accord granted all combatants amnesty.⁵¹ This blanket amnesty subsequently constrains the transitional justice mechanisms in terms of their ability to provide accountability for crimes committed by amnesty recipients, because prosecution is not an option. In the case of Sierra Leone, the primary accountability mechanism for ex-combatants was the TRC.

DDR and transitional justice are further linked by their shared aims of reintegration. Although DDR formally sets out to reintegrate combatants into their communities, transitional justice also frequently attempts to restore bonds between community members and encourage reconciliation rather than vengeance. Their sequencing also links the two, with DDR occurring only shortly

⁵⁰ United Nations Special Office of the Advisor on Africa and the Government of the Democratic Republic of Congo, Second Annual Conference on DDR and Stability in Africa (2007). "DDR and Transitional Justice". Issue paper: Kinshasa, Democratic Republic of Congo: 12-14 June 2007.

⁵¹ (1999). Lomé Peace Accord. G. o. S. L. a. t. R. U. F. o. S. Leone. Lomé, Togo.

before transitional justice mechanisms begin their work. This immediate post-conflict time frame means that both encounter similar societal problems and national sentiment towards their work.

This thesis examines how and why DDR and transitional justice in the form of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in Sierra Leone excluded women ex-combatants from participation. The link between the two peacebuilding mechanisms is investigated throughout the thesis, and will be revisited in the concluding chapter.

University of Cape Town

Chapter Two: Women in Conflict and Peace in Sierra Leone

This chapter provides the historical context to the conflict and peacebuilding efforts in Sierra Leone. The conflict was an extremely complex, decade-long affair, which altered all aspects of women's lives. The women of Sierra Leone were involved in the conflict in a host of different capacities. Through an examination of the evolution of the conflict and peace process from a gender perspective, this chapter will elucidate the various roles women played before and during the conflict and contextualize the discussions of peacebuilding mechanisms that will follow in Chapters Three and Four.

Prelude to a Conflict

Seventeen ethnic groups and 4.5 million people reside in Sierra Leone. Although no ethnic group dominated the country prior to colonization, the majority group was the Mende who lived in the South and East⁵². The next largest ethnic group was the Temne, followed by the Limba, both of whom were dominant in the North. Other ethnic groups included the Kono in the East, the Northern Koranko, the Mandingo, the Loko, the Soso, Fula and Yalunka. In 1808 the British declared Sierra Leone a colony, and specifically designated it as a home for freed former British slaves.⁵³ During the 150-year period of colonization, thousands of freed slaves, known as Krios, entered the colony, changing its demographic composition.⁵⁴ The colonization lasted until Britain granted independence in 1961. During this colonial period the Krios advanced educationally and economically at the expense of the indigenous peoples.⁵⁵

⁵² Mazurana, D. and K. Carlson (2004). *From Combat to Community: Women and Girls of Sierra Leone*. S. N. Anderlini, *Women Waging Peace and The Policy Commission*: 46. p. 10.

⁵³ Truth and Reconciliation Commission, S. L. (2004). *Witness to Truth: Report of the Sierra Leone Truth and Reconciliation Commission, Volume Three B. Witness to Truth: Report of the Sierra Leone Truth and Reconciliation Commission*. Accra, Ghana, Sierra Leone Truth and Reconciliation Commission. **3B**: 514. Chapter 3, para 3.

⁵⁴ Mazurana, D. and K. Carlson (2004). *From Combat to Community: Women and Girls of Sierra Leone*. S. N. Anderlini, *Women Waging Peace and The Policy Commission*: 46. p. 10.

⁵⁵ Truth and Reconciliation Commission, S. L. (2004). *Witness to Truth: Report of the Sierra Leone Truth and Reconciliation Commission, Volume Three B. Witness to Truth: Report of the Sierra Leone Truth and Reconciliation Commission*. Accra, Ghana, Sierra Leone Truth and Reconciliation Commission. **3B**: 514. Chapter 3, para 3.

After World War II, democratic reforms in the country allowed for the formation of political parties. Two major political parties split the country geographically, with the Sierra Leone People's Party (SLPP) composed of Southern Krios and Mendes, and its rival, the All People's Congress (APC), supported by the Temnes in the North. Sir Milton Margai of the SLPP led the country following independence in 1961, but after years of bitter political rivalry, the APC came to power in 1968, led by Prime Minister Siaka Stevens.⁵⁶ Stevens consolidated his power and led the country into a bitter cycle of entrenched corruption and nepotism. Unemployment and poverty became rampant, and Stevens and his successors violently suppressed all dissent and opposition until the outbreak of open conflict in 1991.⁵⁷

The victimization that women endured during the conflict does not come as a shock when one examines the insecurity in which women subsisted prior to the conflict. A number of factors contributed to this insecurity, including low levels of access to education, marginalization in politics, a dearth of legal protections, a precarious economic position, and oppressive religious and cultural mores. Educationally, the women of Sierra Leone were at a marked disadvantage compared to their male counterparts in accessing even the most basic levels of education. Particularly in isolated rural areas with minimal educational provision, culture and tradition encouraged male children to be given priority over women for schooling. The prevalence of early and forced marriages also contributed to the lack of education among women, with many parents choosing to withdraw young girls from school to prepare them for marriage. The 1985 census confirmed that 91.5 percent of the female population over age 5 was illiterate, compared to 83 percent for males. In one region the illiteracy among women was 97 percent. The census also revealed that out of a total of 1.32 million of females aged 5 and above, only ten thousand had completed secondary school, compared to 500,000 males.⁵⁸

⁵⁶ Mazurana, D. and K. Carlson (2004). *From Combat to Community: Women and Girls of Sierra Leone*. S. N. Anderlini, *Women Waging Peace and The Policy Commission*: 46. p. 10.

⁵⁷ Truth and Reconciliation Commission, S. L. (2004). *Witness to Truth: Report of the Sierra Leone Truth and Reconciliation Commission, Volume Three B. Witness to Truth: Report of the Sierra Leone Truth and Reconciliation Commission*. Accra, Ghana, Sierra Leone Truth and Reconciliation Commission. **3B**: 514. Chapter 3 para 4.

⁵⁸ Kandeh, H. B. S. and Ramachandran, K. V. (eds.) (1985). *The Analytical Report, 1985 Population and Housing Census for Sierra Leone, Freetown, Central Statistics Office*. p. 168.

High levels of illiteracy contributed directly to women's inability to participate in politics, particularly in rural areas.⁵⁹ Paradoxically, women in the capital city of Freetown, many of them well-educated Krios, were able to assert themselves and gain positions of power. In 1951 the Sierra Leone Women's Movement (SLWM) was formed, which grew to 2,000 members and was the only organization during the 1950s to attempt to unite all ethnic groups and create a national identity.⁶⁰ Three women became members of the municipal council in 1958. In 1960, one woman was elected Deputy Mayor of Freetown and another was elected Mende Headman in Freetown.⁶¹ Women greeted independence in 1961 and the creation of a constitution with great anticipation, but were disappointed when men were reluctant to share positions of power equitably and revoke or revise the discriminatory laws of the past.⁶² Despite this reluctance, women continued to assert themselves, and in 1961 Constance Cummings-John became the first black African woman to govern a capital city on the continent.⁶³

Although a handful of educated women participated in politics in groundbreaking ways, most rural women had no voice in politics or lawmaking.⁶⁴ Women did not enjoy equal legal status with men in the years before the war. The laws of Sierra Leone were to a large extent discriminatory towards women, and women were not protected in areas that affected them most such as marriage, divorce and inheritance. There was little protection for women from domestic abuse, and sexual crimes against women went largely unpunished. Law enforcement and the judiciary lacked skills and experience to investigate and prosecute sexual crimes against women, as these crimes were generally considered domestic crimes to be settled within the family.⁶⁵ Many rural women were subject to the rulings of customary law, which were almost always

⁵⁹ Ibid. Chapter 3 para 42 and 53.

⁶⁰ Ibid. Chapter 3 para 44.

⁶¹ Ibid. Chapter 3 para 45

⁶² King, J. (2002). The Situation of Women and Girls in the Pre-Conflict, Conflict and Post-Conflict Sierra Leone, Campaign for Good Governance, Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Sierra Leone: 7. p. 1.

⁶³ Truth and Reconciliation Commission, S. L. (2004). Witness to Truth: Report of the Sierra Leone Truth and Reconciliation Commission, Volume Three B. Witness to Truth: Report of the Sierra Leone Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Accra, Ghana, Sierra Leone Truth and Reconciliation Commission. **3B**: 514. Chapter 3, paras 47 and 48.

⁶⁴ Ibid. Chapter 3, para 54.

⁶⁵ King, J. (2002). The Situation of Women and Girls in the Pre-Conflict, Conflict and Post-Conflict Sierra Leone, Campaign for Good Governance, Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Sierra Leone: 7. p. 2.

discriminatory.⁶⁶

Women in Sierra Leone have always performed the majority of agricultural work, providing the backbone of the country's subsistence economy. However, very few of these women actually owned the land they cultivated. In rural areas the local chief held the land, and tenure was often based on family groups rather than the individual. In most cases, patriarchal laws prohibited women from inheriting land from their families or husbands. In many areas, if a woman was widowed, she could be removed from her husband's land and forced to either return to her parents' land or find a new husband.⁶⁷ Such discriminatory laws disempowered women economically in the years leading up to the war.⁶⁸ In the 1980s the country struggled with a severe economic downturn, the result of the mismanagement of the country's plentiful natural resources.⁶⁹ All Sierra Leoneans were negatively affected by this downturn, but ordinary women bore the impact of this crisis more than men because of their precarious economic position and dependence on male relatives.

The majority of Sierra Leoneans are followers of the Islamic faith or local traditional religious beliefs – and in many instances, a mixture of both. There is also a significant Christian population, which also frequently incorporates traditional beliefs. These religious traditions often confine women and girls with strict conservative values regarding their sexuality. Virginity is revered across ethnic and cultural lines, and often a girl's virginity constitutes the honor of her entire family.⁷⁰ Female genital cutting (FGC), or female genital mutilation (FGM), is also a common rite of passage for young Sierra Leonean women. The UN special rapporteur on violence against women in Sierra Leone estimated in 2001 that 89 percent of women were

⁶⁶ Truth and Reconciliation Commission, S. L. (2004). Witness to Truth: Report of the Sierra Leone Truth and Reconciliation Commission, Volume Three B. Witness to Truth: Report of the Sierra Leone Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Accra, Ghana, Sierra Leone Truth and Reconciliation Commission. **3B**: 514. Chapter 3, paras 63 and 64.

⁶⁷ Unruh, J. D. and H. Turray (2006). Land Tenure, Food Security and Investment in Postwar Sierra Leone. Livelihood Support Programme, Access to Natural Resources Sub-Programme. New York, Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations. **22**. p. 7.

⁶⁸ Ibid. Chapter 3, para 66.

⁶⁹ Mazurana, D. and K. Carlson (2004). From Combat to Community: Women and Girls of Sierra Leone. S. N. Anderlini, Women Waging Peace and The Policy Commission: 46. p. 10.

⁷⁰ Truth and Reconciliation Commission, S. L. (2004). Witness to Truth: Report of the Sierra Leone Truth and Reconciliation Commission, Volume Three B. Witness to Truth: Report of the Sierra Leone Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Accra, Ghana, Sierra Leone Truth and Reconciliation Commission. **3B**: 514., Chapter 3, para 81.

affected by FGC⁷¹.

The majority of women in Sierra Leone, many of them illiterate, unrepresented in government, unprotected by the law, and unable to find financial independence or security, were placed in an extremely vulnerable position in the lead up to the conflict. Violence erupted in Sierra Leone in 1991, and women and their bodies became targets.

The Conflict

Political unrest and the severe economic downturn that occurred in the 1980s contributed directly to the outbreak of conflict on March 23, 1991. Members of a group calling itself the Revolutionary United Front (RUF), led by Foday Sankoh, a former corporal in the Sierra Leone Army (SLA) who was backed by Liberia, crossed the border from Liberia into Sierra Leone and seized the town of Bomaru. The RUF immediately claimed responsibility for the incursion and declared its objective to overthrow the government, still led by the APC and Stevens' successor, Joseph Saidu Momoh.⁷² Although the RUF began the conflict with this clear objective, the fighting dragged on for the next ten years, and lines eventually blurred. The number of military groups involved grew, and their goals and tactics evolved with the conflict.

The final report of the TRC chronicles the numerous violations perpetrated against women during the conflict, and confirms that women endured excruciating violations ranging from displacement to disembowelment.⁷³ Despite their undeniable victimhood, it is also important to recognize that women acted with their own agency in the conflict. Women represented between 10 to 30 percent of all combatants, and some rebel groups were estimated to be half comprised of

⁷¹ Coomaraswamy, R. (2002). United Nations Report of the Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women in Sierra Leone, Integration of the Human Rights of Women and the Gender Perspective: Violence against Women. New York, United Nations. p. 14.

⁷² Mazurana, D. and K. Carlson (2004). From Combat to Community: Women and Girls of Sierra Leone. S. N. Anderlini, Women Waging Peace and The Policy Commission: 46. p. 10.

⁷³ Truth and Reconciliation Commission, S. L. (2004). Witness to Truth: Report of the Sierra Leone Truth and Reconciliation Commission, Volume Three B. Witness to Truth: Report of the Sierra Leone Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Accra, Ghana, Sierra Leone Truth and Reconciliation Commission. **3B**: 514., Chapter 3, para 275.

children, many of whom were girls.⁷⁴ Some of the armed groups established special units consisting exclusively of women and girls. The RUF had a unit known as the Women's Auxiliary Corps (WACS), which ran the Small Girls Unit of the RUF.⁷⁵

Large numbers of women and children joined the forces unwillingly after being abducted. The TRC final report notes that abduction was one of the most common crimes perpetrated against women, but that exact numbers of victims do not exist because DDR failed "to make appropriate arrangements to include women and girl ex-combatants in their programs"⁷⁶. Thus, the statistics that emerged from DDR on women were not accurately representative of women's actual population in the fighting forces, nor do they provide complete data on the number of women abducted into the fighting forces. A survey conducted in 2004 of 50 women and girls who had been combatants in the conflict found that nearly all claimed having been abducted. Their average age at abduction was twelve.⁷⁷ The TRC's final report also mentions those women who were involved in the fighting forces of their own volition. Many of these women believed in the cause for which they were fighting, and others had taken up arms to avenge the death of a loved one.⁷⁸

The final report of the TRC lists five different groups as having committed atrocities against women: the Revolutionary United Front (RUF), the Civil Defense Forces (CDF), the Armed Forces Revolutionary Council (AFRC), the Sierra Leone Army (SLA), and the West Side Boys. The RUF and AFRC are classified as 'rebel' groups, while the SLA and CDF were 'pro-government'; the West Side Boys did not have a political affiliation. Each of these groups violated women as a tactic of war, and none made any attempt to prosecute or punish those

⁷⁴ Mazurana, D. and K. Carlson (2004). *From Combat to Community: Women and Girls of Sierra Leone*. S. N. Anderlini, *Women Waging Peace and The Policy Commission*: 46. p. 6.

⁷⁵ Truth and Reconciliation Commission, S. L. (2004). *Witness to Truth: Report of the Sierra Leone Truth and Reconciliation Commission, Volume Three B. Witness to Truth: Report of the Sierra Leone Truth and Reconciliation Commission*. Accra, Ghana, Sierra Leone Truth and Reconciliation Commission. **3B**: 514., Chapter 3, para. 386

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, Chapter 3, para. 211.

⁷⁷ Mazurana, D. and K. Carlson (2004). *From Combat to Community: Women and Girls of Sierra Leone*. S. N. Anderlini, *Women Waging Peace and The Policy Commission*: 46., p. 2.

⁷⁸ Truth and Reconciliation Commission, S. L. (2004). *Witness to Truth: Report of the Sierra Leone Truth and Reconciliation Commission, Volume Three B. Witness to Truth: Report of the Sierra Leone Truth and Reconciliation Commission*. Accra, Ghana, Sierra Leone Truth and Reconciliation Commission. **3B**: 514. Chapter 3, para. 382.

members who committed acts of sexual violence.⁷⁹ Although detailed information about women's involvement with each of these groups is often sparse or unavailable, it is important to recognize that the involvement and victimization of women did vary with each group and change over time.

The Revolutionary United Front

Within 18 months of the start of the conflict, the RUF controlled much of the diamond-rich eastern part of the country. 400,000 Sierra Leoneans were internally displaced, and hundreds of thousands more became refugees abroad. Perpetuated by the RUF's income from trading illegal diamonds in Liberia, the conflict eventually spilled over not only into Liberia, but also Guinea and Cote d'Ivoire.⁸⁰ The TRC found that the RUF perpetrated the highest number of human rights violations during the conflict, as well as most of sexual violence and rape violations it recorded. The RUF used rape and torture as a tactic of war from the start of the conflict in 1991. In 1994, the group changed from conventional to guerrilla warfare tactics. This change resulted in a rapid increase in the group's victimization of women.⁸¹ Constantly on the move in the bush, combatants would abduct women and girls to act as porters and sex slaves. Many of these women and girls became 'bush wives', acting as sexual and domestic servants for specific male combatants.

An investigation of sexual violence during the conflict revealed that the RUF, and aligned rebel group the AFRC, specifically targeted young girls for sexual attack in an attempt to 'virginate' them. The rebels favored girls and young women whom they believed to be virgins because Sierra Leonean society places a high value on virginity. By taking the virginity of these young girls the combatants made them less eligible for marriage and easier to subdue and enslave. A fifteen-year-old girl from Freetown described her experiences during an RUF/AFRC invasion that took place in 1999:

⁷⁹ Ibid. Chapter 3, para 325.

⁸⁰ Mazurana, D. and K. Carlson (2004). *From Combat to Community: Women and Girls of Sierra Leone*. S. N. Anderlini, Women Waging Peace and The Policy Commission: 46. p. 10.

⁸¹ Truth and Reconciliation Commission, S. L. (2004). *Witness to Truth: Report of the Sierra Leone Truth and Reconciliation Commission, Volume Three B. Witness to Truth: Report of the Sierra Leone Truth and Reconciliation Commission*. Accra, Ghana, Sierra Leone Truth and Reconciliation Commission. **3B**: 514. Chapter 3, para 331.

We were hiding in the mosque when two rebels dressed in civilian [clothing] entered. It was dark but they shone their flashlights looking for girls and said, "We are coming for young girls ... for virgins, even if they tie their heads like old grandmothers, we will find them." They also said that if the people did not hand over the young girls, they would open fire on all of us.⁸²

Brutal attacks such as these left devastating psychological scars, as well as serious medical problems. A girl who was sixteen when she was brutally gang raped by ten RUF soldiers described the physical repercussions of her attack:

I was bleeding a lot from my vagina and anus and was in so much pain. My mother washed me in warm water and salt but I bled for three days. I can no longer control my bladder or bowels as I was torn below. We stayed in the bush until ECOMOG took over Koidu. When we came out of the bush, even adults would run away from me and refused to eat with me because I smelled so badly. I had an operation in 2000 but it did not work. Before I got a catheter in 2001, I had no friends, as I smelled too bad. I am still in pain and have a problem with vaginal discharge. I also have nightmares and feel discouraged.⁸³

The RUF was not alone in employing brutal tactics to victimize women, but it was a primary perpetrator of sexual human rights violations.

Although there were a number of women who became combatants with the RUF of their own volition, the majority of women RUF combatants stated 'abduction' as their means of entry into the fighting forces. Regardless of what they stated as their primary tasks with the forces, almost half of all women received basic military skills and weapon training from their male counterparts.⁸⁴ So although most women were forcibly recruited into the RUF with the intent to be used primarily for sexual and domestic servitude, many acted in military roles similar to male combatants.⁸⁵

⁸² (2003). "'We'll Kill You if You Cry': Sexual Violence in the Sierra Leone Conflict." Human Rights Watch 15(1): 79. p. 28

⁸³ Ibid. p. 29.

⁸⁴ Mazurana, D. and K. Carlson (2004). *From Combat to Community: Women and Girls of Sierra Leone*. S. N. Anderlini, *Women Waging Peace and The Policy Commission*: 46., p. 12.

⁸⁵ Truth and Reconciliation Commission, S. L. (2004). *Witness to Truth: Report of the Sierra Leone Truth and Reconciliation Commission, Volume Three B. Witness to Truth: Report of the Sierra Leone Truth and Reconciliation Commission*. Accra, Ghana, Sierra Leone Truth and Reconciliation Commission. **3B**: 514., Chapter 33, para 346.

The leadership of the RUF was primarily male. The informal 'wives' of these men occupied positions of considerable power, however. A commander's captive 'wife', often a young girl, would control the camp when her husband was away, overseeing the distribution of the camp's resources and selecting troops and spies to send to her husband in the field. Commander's 'wives' were also in charge of Small Boys Units (SBU) and Small Girls Units (SGU). These Units, comprised of boys and girls ages 6 to 15 were used primarily for raiding and spying, but also occasionally in combat. Because their relationships to their 'husbands' were informal, these 'wives' often found themselves replaced by new women and sent to fight in the front lines of the conflict. Most women and girl combatants attached themselves to a male combatant in order to find some protection against gang rape, as well as to have a stable source of food.⁸⁶ Mazurana and Carlson estimated that of 45,000 RUF combatants, 7,500 were girls.⁸⁷

The Sierra Leone Army

The Sierra Leone Army (SLA), the national army, had a wide presence in the country during the conflict. SLA troops were less mobile than the RUF, and were often stationed in barracks outside towns or villages for months at a time. As the conflict spread and festered, the SLA's tactics often sunk to the same level as their rivals. The TRC report states that SLA soldiers used sexual violence as a means of controlling the civilian population and that particularly after 1994, the SLA acted very similarly to the RUF by abducting local women to use primarily as sex slaves.⁸⁸ Mazurana and Carlson estimate that the SLA had 1,167 girl combatants out of a total of 14,000 combatants.⁸⁹

The Civil Defense Forces

As the violence between the RUF and the SLA increasingly terrorized civilians, the Civil Defense Forces (CDF) emerged as local pro-government militia groups to defend the population.

⁸⁶ Mazurana, D. and K. Carlson (2004). *From Combat to Community: Women and Girls of Sierra Leone*. S. N. Anderlini, *Women Waging Peace and The Policy Commission*: 46. p. 14.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.* p. 3.

⁸⁸ Truth and Reconciliation Commission, S. L. (2004). *Witness to Truth: Report of the Sierra Leone Truth and Reconciliation Commission, Volume Three B. Witness to Truth: Report of the Sierra Leone Truth and Reconciliation Commission*. Accra, Ghana, Sierra Leone Truth and Reconciliation Commission. **3B**: 514. Chapter 3, para 363.

⁸⁹ Mazurana, D. and K. Carlson (2004). *From Combat to Community: Women and Girls of Sierra Leone*. S. N. Anderlini, *Women Waging Peace and The Policy Commission*: 46. p. 3.

The government provided the CDF with funding and supplies throughout the conflict.⁹⁰ The CDF was largely based on pre-existing traditional secret male hunting groups including the Kamajors, Gbethes, Donsos, Tamaboros and Kapras, which were organized along ethnic and District lines.⁹¹

The TRC found very few instances of sexual violence committed by the CDF prior to 1996. The various groups within the CDF upheld traditional values, which included the prohibition of sexual intercourse while performing a duty to society. 1997 marked a drastic turning point for the CDF. The conflict continued to escalate, forcing the CDF to take in more combatants and increasingly overlook ethical codes among new recruits. The TRC's final report noted that in the period after 1997, the CDF committed acts of sexual violence at approximately the same rate and with the same brutality as the RUF.⁹² Like the SLA, CDF forces would often be stationed near a town or village for months at a time, and it was common practice to kidnap local women and girls to be kept as sex slaves.

Although the CDF did begin as an all-male group, it eventually came to incorporate women and girls as full combatants. Mazurana and Carlson estimated that approximately 1,722 girls fought with the CDF, out of 68,865 total forces. After the war, CDF officials denied that the group had ever incorporated women or girls.⁹³ This assertion had severe detrimental effects for the reintegration of women and girl CDF ex-combatants and their participation in peacebuilding mechanisms, which will be further examined in Chapter Three.

The Armed Forces Revolutionary Council

The Armed Forces Revolutionary Council (AFRC) came into existence after the overthrow of the government of President Ahmad Tejan Kabbah on May 25, 1997. Kabbah fled the country to Guinea and the leader of the AFRC, former Army Major Johnny Paul Koroma, was appointed

⁹⁰ Ibid. p. 2.

⁹¹ Truth and Reconciliation Commission, S. L. (2004). Witness to Truth: Report of the Sierra Leone Truth and Reconciliation Commission, Volume Three B. Witness to Truth: Report of the Sierra Leone Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Accra, Ghana, Sierra Leone Truth and Reconciliation Commission. **3B**: 514. Chapter 3, para 347.

⁹² Ibid. Chapter 3, para 352.

⁹³ Mazurana, D. and K. Carlson (2004). From Combat to Community: Women and Girls of Sierra Leone. S. N. Anderlini, Women Waging Peace and The Policy Commission: 46. p. 12.

Head of State.⁹⁴ Following the coup, the leadership of AFRC called upon the RUF to join them in government, and the two factions referred to their alliance as 'The People's Army'.⁹⁵ Together with the RUF, the AFRC perpetrated the invasion of Freetown on January 6, 1999, killing 5,000 residents and kidnapping an estimated 5,000 more, mostly women and girls.⁹⁶

The pattern of abuse committed by the AFRC shows that the group had an extraordinary record of female victimization, committing three times as many sexual violations as other violations that the TRC recorded.⁹⁷ Like the RUF, the presence of women and girls in the AFRC fighting forces was relatively well known. Girls made up an astonishing 1/6 of the total AFRC fighting forces – 1,667 out of 10,000 combatants.⁹⁸

The West Side Boys

In the wake of the invasion of Freetown in 1999, an informal fighting group coalesced around former Army and AFRC commanders who had been involved in the fighting. Membership included those abducted during the fighting in Freetown and unemployed and disaffected youth who feared reprisal for their role in the invasion. Although an offshoot of the SLA, the group had no political allegiance, and was more a gang of bandits than a politically motivated fighting force.⁹⁹ At times the West Side Boys acted both for and against the government. The TRC found

⁹⁴ Truth and Reconciliation Commission, S. L. (2004). *Witness to Truth: Report of the Sierra Leone Truth and Reconciliation Commission, Volume Two. Witness to Truth: Report of the Sierra Leone Truth and Reconciliation Commission*. Accra, Ghana, Sierra Leone Truth and Reconciliation Commission. 2: 503. Chapter 1, para 27.

⁹⁵ Truth and Reconciliation Commission, S. L. (2004). *Witness to Truth: Report of the Sierra Leone Truth and Reconciliation Commission, Volume Three B. Witness to Truth: Report of the Sierra Leone Truth and Reconciliation Commission*. Accra, Ghana, Sierra Leone Truth and Reconciliation Commission. 3B: 514. Chapter 3, para 356.

⁹⁶ Mazurana, D. and K. Carlson (2004). *From Combat to Community: Women and Girls of Sierra Leone*. S. N. Anderlini, Women Waging Peace and The Policy Commission: 46. p. 16.

⁹⁷ Truth and Reconciliation Commission, S. L. (2004). *Witness to Truth: Report of the Sierra Leone Truth and Reconciliation Commission, Volume Three B. Witness to Truth: Report of the Sierra Leone Truth and Reconciliation Commission*. Accra, Ghana, Sierra Leone Truth and Reconciliation Commission. 3B: 514. Chapter 3, para 357.

⁹⁸ Mazurana, D. and K. Carlson (2004). *From Combat to Community: Women and Girls of Sierra Leone*. S. N. Anderlini, Women Waging Peace and The Policy Commission: 46. p. 3.

⁹⁹ Truth and Reconciliation Commission, S. L. (2004). *Witness to Truth: Report of the Sierra Leone Truth and Reconciliation Commission, Volume Three B. Witness to Truth: Report of the Sierra Leone Truth and Reconciliation Commission*. Accra, Ghana, Sierra Leone Truth and Reconciliation Commission. 3B: 514. Chapter 3, para 372.

the West Side Boys responsible for abducting women and girls and forcing them into marriage, among numerous other violations.¹⁰⁰

Peacekeeping Forces

The TRC listed the above five groups as the major perpetrators of violence against women. Shockingly, the Commission also found that a number of women also had their rights violated in the refugee camps.¹⁰¹ In April 2002, the UNHCR and Save the Children-UK issued a report on Sierra Leonean Refugees in Guinea detailing the violations which women and girls amongst others suffered while refugees in Guinea. Young girls and women were forced to have sex in return for food and assistance. Many of them were forced by economic circumstances to become prostitutes in brothels established in the camps. More than 1,500 people were interviewed and told similar stories. Men complained of how they were not given access to food because they had no wife or daughter to barter for food or supplies. Women and girls told of how their names would be taken off lists if they refused to have sex with peacekeepers and humanitarian workers.¹⁰²

Overall Findings

The majority of women and girls involved in the conflict as combatants were forcibly recruited through abduction, and suffered numerous other violations at the hands of male combatants. Regardless of their means of entry into the fighting forces and subsequent victimization, however, these women and girls made critical contributions to the conflict through their actions as combatants. Despite the clear presence and contributions of women and girls in the fighting forces, particularly in the rebel groups, female combatants faced overwhelming barriers to participation in post-conflict peacebuilding. Cynthia Enloe explains this phenomenon thus, “In

¹⁰⁰ Truth and Reconciliation Commission, S. L. (2004). Witness to Truth: Report of the Sierra Leone Truth and Reconciliation Commission, Volume Two. Witness to Truth: Report of the Sierra Leone Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Accra, Ghana, Sierra Leone Truth and Reconciliation Commission. 2: 503. Chapter 1, para 512.

¹⁰¹ Truth and Reconciliation Commission, S. L. (2004). Witness to Truth: Report of the Sierra Leone Truth and Reconciliation Commission, Volume Three B. Witness to Truth: Report of the Sierra Leone Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Accra, Ghana, Sierra Leone Truth and Reconciliation Commission. 3B: 514. Chapter 3, para 235.

¹⁰² (2002). Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration, and Gender-based Violence in Sierra Leone. Precious Resources: Adolescents in the Reconstruction of Sierra Leone. New York, Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children.

the late twentieth century, women who have been mobilized to serve the military's needs are still vulnerable to the stereotype of camp follower—dispensable, disreputable—no matter how professional their formal position is in the military”¹⁰³. Women combatants would feel the repercussions of this stereotype in their experiences with peace negotiations and the subsequent peacebuilding mechanisms in Sierra Leone.

Women and Peacebuilding in Sierra Leone

Peace Activism

Women played an important role in the peace movement, demanding a cessation of hostilities and organizing peace marches and rallies. The Women's Forum began in 1994 as a discussion and networking group for women's organizations in Freetown. The Women's Forum included the Sierra Leone Association of University Women (SLAUW), the Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA), the Women's Association for National Development (WAND), the National Organisation for Women (NOW), and the Sierra Leone Women's Movement for Peace (SLWMP). The SLWMP received the Forum's support to actively appeal to the government, rebels, and the international community for a negotiated settlement, and organized its first rally in January 1995. Yasmin Jusu-Sheriff, a Sierra Leonean gender activist, described it as a joyous event, where “Female professionals, previously known for standing aloof from the concerns of ordinary people, danced through central Freetown, linking arms with female soldiers, petty traders and student nurses, singing choruses”¹⁰⁴. The final report of the TRC noted that women's organizations “took the lead in rallying society towards the cessation of hostilities”¹⁰⁵. In the buildup to the 1996 elections, women's groups worked to educate the population on electoral proceedings, recruit and train election observers, and pressure the military to respect the election's results. Eventually, they helped monitor the election, which led to the coming into office of President Ahmed Tejan Kabbah.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰³ Enloe, C. (2000). *Maneuvers: The International Politics of Militarizing Women's Lives*. London, University of California Press. p. 40.

¹⁰⁴ Jusu-Sheriff, Y. (2000) "Sierra Leonean Women and the Peace Process." **Volume**, DOI:

¹⁰⁵ Truth and Reconciliation Commission, S. L. (2004). *Witness to Truth: Report of the Sierra Leone Truth and Reconciliation Commission, Volume Three B. Witness to Truth: Report of the Sierra Leone Truth and Reconciliation Commission*. Accra, Ghana, Sierra Leone Truth and Reconciliation Commission. **3B**: 514. Chapter 3, para 408.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.* Chapter 3, para 409; see also Jusu-Sheriff, Y. (2000) "Sierra Leonean Women and the Peace Process."

Kabbah initiated the first of several failed peace negotiations in 1996 with the Abidjan Peace Accords. The agreement drafted between the Sierra Leone government and the RUF called for a cease-fire and the transformation of the RUF into a political party. Despite women's involvement in the conflict and in the movement for peace, no women were present at the negotiations in Abidjan.¹⁰⁷ Jusu-Sheriff noted that, "Although the participation in the search for peace and democratization processes were very empowering experiences for individual women, the movement was perhaps not as influential as sometimes suggested"¹⁰⁸. The women's movement, although successful in pressuring the government and rebel groups to make peace, was unsuccessful at making its voice heard during peace negotiations. Following the failed Abidjan Accords, the SLWMP disintegrated due to internal conflict and the Forum struggled to "fulfill the limited role offered by a flawed agreement it had played no part in drawing up"¹⁰⁹. The May 1997 coup caused many peace organizers to flee into exile, and ended women's attempts at independent intervention in the peace process.¹¹⁰

Women and the Peace Negotiations

The TRC report states that eventually, "the actions of women tipped the balance in restoring peace in Sierra Leone," but that "while women play a major role in the cessation of hostilities, they are usually ignored and under-represented at peace negotiations and in the attendant peace-building institutions that come into existence thereafter. This was exactly the case in Sierra Leone."¹¹¹ Two women representatives were involved in the final peace process, the Lomé Peace Accord, which was negotiated in 1999, and only one woman's signature is present on the Lomé Accord – a representative of the Organization for African Union, not of Sierra Leone. Also, no women were consulted in the constitution of the various commissions established for the promotion of good governance agreed upon in the peace accord, including the Commission for the Consolidation of Peace, under which the National Commission on Demobilization,

¹⁰⁷ Mazurana, D. and K. Carlson (2004). *From Combat to Community: Women and Girls of Sierra Leone*. S. N. Anderlini, *Women Waging Peace and The Policy Commission*: 46. p. 15.

¹⁰⁸ Jusu-Sheriff, Y. (2000) "Sierra Leonean Women and the Peace Process."

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ Truth and Reconciliation Commission, S. L. (2004). *Witness to Truth: Report of the Sierra Leone Truth and Reconciliation Commission, Volume Three B. Witness to Truth: Report of the Sierra Leone Truth and Reconciliation Commission*. Accra, Ghana, Sierra Leone Truth and Reconciliation Commission. 3B: 514. Chapter 3, paras 420 and 424.

Disarmament and Reintegration (NCDDR) was chartered. This section of the TRC's report concluded that:

Women played a major role in ensuring that the conflict came to an end. However, they were marginalised in the peace talks and even more so in the commissions established after the peace talks in Lomé. This is significant and is characteristic of most conflicts where women's voices are not heard or taken into account.¹¹²

It was exceedingly difficult for women to make their voices heard during the peace negotiations, and very few of their concerns were addressed in the final peace agreement. The Abidjan Accord made no mention of women or gender, and the Lomé Accord makes only one reference to women, in Article XXVIII (2) which states,

Given that women have been particularly victimized during the war, special attention shall be accorded to their needs and potentials in formulating and implementing national rehabilitation, reconstruction and development programmes, to enable them to play a central role in the moral, social and physical reconstruction of Sierra Leone.¹¹³

The agreement, although making an attempt to reach out to women, assumed that women and girls were victims only, and that their role in the perpetuation of the conflict and the building of peace had been minimal.¹¹⁴ This categorization of women as victims, neglecting the multiple roles they played during the war, had severe consequences for the peacebuilding process in Sierra Leone, with a particular effect on the failure of demilitarization, reintegration and reconciliation efforts.

Gender-insensitive peacebuilding in Sierra Leone is owed in large part to the poor to nonexistent input from women during peace negotiations. It must be said that the exclusion of women from these peace negotiations and commissions was not the sole cause of the poor gender policies prevalent in immediate post-conflict Sierra Leone. Difficult cultural barriers to participation might have overcome even the most nuanced attempts to include women. It is also a simplification of politics to believe that, had there been women present in these spaces, they would have adequately represented women's concerns, and these concerns would have changed

¹¹² Ibid. Chapter 3, para 421.

¹¹³ (1999). Lomé Peace Accord. G. o. S. L. a. t. R. U. F. o. S. Leone. Lomé, Togo. Article XXVIII (2).

¹¹⁴ Mazurana, D. and K. Carlson (2004). From Combat to Community: Women and Girls of Sierra Leone. S. N. Anderlini, Women Waging Peace and The Policy Commission: 46. p. 26.

the way policy was written and implemented. Unfortunately, there are many examples of women who have not represented women's concerns in negotiations, and even more examples of men who have turned a deaf ear to these women's concerns. Nonetheless, female representation is an important step towards listening and taking action on issues important to women.

The silence of women's voices and concerns in the peace negotiations for Sierra Leone had a profound effect on the way peacebuilding was conceptualized and carried out. The following chapters will focus on the nexus between this silence, the conceptualization of the 'female combatant' and her needs, and the objectives of DDR and the TRC.

University of Cape Town

Chapter Three: Women Ex-Combatants and DDR

“In order to be successful, DDR initiatives must be based on a concrete understanding of who combatants are—women, men, girls, boys. Recent analyses of DDR processes from a gender perspective have highlighted that women combatants are often invisible and their needs are overlooked.”

-UN Secretary General Kofi Annan¹¹⁵

This chapter examines the demobilization, disarmament and reintegration (DDR) program in Sierra Leone from a gender perspective. An overview of the DDR program and a review of its gender-specific policies will show how women and their special needs as ex-combatants were ignored and underappreciated: first, through the androcentric misconception of a ‘combatant’ as a weapon-carrying male; second through the faulty assumption that male ex-combatants posed a more significant threat to peace and security in the country and should receive the vast majority of scarce DDR resources. The chapter will then examine the repercussions of these misconceptions on women ex-combatant’s participation in DDR and the ways in which women’s absence compromised the program’s achievements as a peacebuilding mechanism. Women’s experiences with DDR in Mozambique and Liberia also provide insight into a pattern of non-involvement that extends beyond peacebuilding in Sierra Leone.

DDR in Sierra Leone

As a part of the failed Abidjan Agreement signed in 1997 between the government of Sierra Leone and the Revolutionary United Front (RUF), the government agreed to institute a DDR program. The goals of the program were threefold:

1. Collect, register, and destroy all conventional weapons and munitions turned in by combatants;
2. Demobilize the initially estimated 45,000 combatants from the Sierra Leone Army, Revolutionary United Front, Armed Forces Revolutionary Council, and the Civil Defense Forces (12% of whom were thought to be women); and
3. Support ex-combatants through demobilization to prepare them for reintegration.¹¹⁶

¹¹⁵ Annan, K. (2002). Women, Peace and Security. *The Secretary General's Study*. New York, United Nations: 192. p. 129.

¹¹⁶ Malan, M., S. Meek, et al. (2003). "Sierra Leone: Building the Road to Recovery." *Monograph 80*. p. 25.

The program took place in three phases. Phase I, from 1998 to 1999, was administered by the National Commission on Demobilization, Disarmament and Reintegration (NCDDR), chaired by President Kabbah, with assistance from the Economic Community of West African States Monitoring Group (ECOMOG). Phase II, initiated after the Lomé Accord in 1999, was also run by the NCDDR, but with the assistance of the United Nations Observer Mission to Sierra Leone (UNOMSIL). Phase III, from 2000 to 2002, saw the replacement of UNOMSIL with the larger United Nations Assistance Mission to Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL).¹¹⁷

During Phases I and II, potential participants were asked to disassemble and reassemble a weapon, usually an AK-47, to gain entry into the program. Since participants were required to have participated in armed conflict, it was believed that the disassembly and assembly of a weapon was a good way to assess eligibility. In Phase III, group disarmament was allowed, which meant that a group of ex-combatants could present a weapon together to be eligible for DDR. Throughout, children were never required to turn in a weapon. However, this policy was frequently ignored, and it was common practice for DDR camps to turn away children who arrived without a weapon.¹¹⁸

The DDR program demobilized a total of 72,490 combatants, significantly more than the government's initial estimate of 45,000 combatants. The program also collected a total of 42,300 weapons and 1.2 million rounds of ammunition. In most instances, combatants were received in cantonment facilities and provided with basic necessities. In the facilities, they received reintegration training that included trauma and psychosocial counseling. They were also provided with 'reinsertion packages' – cash stipends for their first three months of resettlement – and they were transported back to their respective communities.¹¹⁹

One of the long-term purposes of DDR is to keep ex-combatants from taking up arms in a future conflict, or crossing a border and contributing to a conflict elsewhere. Ensuring that ex-combatants find sustainable employment in their communities upon re-entry is a critical

¹¹⁷ Mazurana, D. and K. Carlson (2004). *From Combat to Community: Women and Girls of Sierra Leone*. S. N. Anderlini, *Women Waging Peace and The Policy Commission*: 46. p. 18.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.* p. 3.

¹¹⁹ Malan, M., S. Meek, et al. (2003). "Sierra Leone: Building the Road to Recovery." *Monograph* 80. p. 40.

component of DDR. In Sierra Leone, reintegration efforts continued in the ex-combatants' communities, with more than three quarters of DDR participants registering for job skills-training programs. Most programs focused on apprenticeships and vocational training for ex-combatants, who typically had very few marketable skills. Many ex-combatants were encouraged to find employment with local public works or development projects. The National Commission on DDR placed 6,452 ex-combatants in schools, providing them with sponsorship of school fees, textbooks, uniforms and a subsistence allowance for one year. In 2002 the Commission also sponsored 22 agricultural projects that befitted nearly 4,000 ex-combatants.¹²⁰

The social reintegration of ex-combatants proved to be extremely difficult. Communities feared that the return of ex-combatants would mean a return to violence, and ex-combatants feared that community members would target them for retribution. A common source of contention was the communities' belief that ex-combatants were being rewarded for their participation in the conflict with reinsertion packages, while communities, often the victims of violence, were receiving no compensation. NCDDR sponsored a sensitization campaign in the media, preparing both ex-combatants and communities for reintegration. In the cantonment camps, ex-combatants were provided with counseling on community re-entry and civic education.¹²¹ Still, reconciliation remains a slow process, much too large of a project for DDR alone to tackle. Chapter Four will focus on how the Truth and Reconciliation Commission continued this mission of social reintegration.

Women Combatants and DDR

As already emphasized in the previous chapters, women represented between 10 to 30 percent of all combatants in the conflict, and children represented up to 50 percent of some rebel groups.¹²² During Phases I and II of DDR, women accounted for 6 percent of DDR participants and girls for .6 percent. In Phase III, when group disarmament was allowed, women's participation increased to 7 percent and girls' to .7 percent.¹²³ Of the estimated 48,216 children involved in the

¹²⁰ Ibid. p. 44.

¹²¹ Ibid. p. 27.

¹²² Ibid. p. 6.

¹²³ Ibid. p. 18.

conflict as combatants only 7,000 passed through DDR.¹²⁴ Given these statistics, DDR efforts in Sierra Leone had an abysmal record of attracting women and young people to participate.

The government of Sierra Leone excluded women from both the peace table and from the NCDDR, the commission charged with planning and implementing DDR. A by-product of this exclusion of women from the NCDDR was that planners gave little thought to the role that women had played as combatants in the conflict. The NCDDR never targeted women as a critical group for inclusion, despite their known presence in the fighting forces. Although female combatants were welcome to participate, their participation was based on the assumption that a 'combatant' would have a weapon to turn in.

The United Nations joined the government of Sierra Leone in administering DDR in 1999 and did little to alter the policies that were so ineffective at achieving participation by women. The UN's DDR gender policy was so inadequate that it inspired the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) to publish a paper in 2004 in which it criticized the UN for having a "narrow and traditional" definition of 'combatant' as an armed man.¹²⁵ The document accused the UN and its partner governments of targeting the most dangerous male population for DDR in an attempt to maximize their cost-benefit ratio. However, this was done at the expense of women and other combatants who did not fit into the category of male, able-bodied combatant, but who had the potential to make critical contributions to peace and stability nonetheless. UNIFEM argued that this androcentric policy not only made DDR activities less efficient, but it also ran the risk of reinforcing existing gender inequalities and exacerbating economic hardship for women and girl ex-combatants, which in turn would create conditions which are fertile ground for re-recruitment into armed groups, and may "undermine the peace building potential of DDR processes".¹²⁶

In its updated 2006 "Integrated DDR Standards" (IDDRS), the UN seems to have listened to this claim by UNIFEM and others:

¹²⁴ Ibid. p. 3.

¹²⁵ Douglas, S., V. Farr, et al. (2004). *Getting it Right, Doing it Right: Gender and Demobilization, Disarmament and Reintegration*. S. Douglas and F. Hill. New York, United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM): 53. p. 4.

¹²⁶ Ibid. p. 32.

A narrow definition of who qualifies as a 'combatant' came about because DDR focuses on neutralizing the most potentially dangerous members of a society (and because of limits imposed by the size of the DDR budget); but leaving women out of the process underestimates the extent to which sustainable peace-building and security require them to participate equally in social transformation.¹²⁷

DDR in Sierra Leone ended in 2002, before UNIFEM published its pronounced critique in 2004, and long before the UN updated its DDR standards in 2006. Dyan Mazurana and Kristopher Carlson, researchers who conducted a broad study published in 2004 on female participation in DDR in Sierra Leone, discovered that the UN had declared the DDR process there a massive success, and touted it as a model upon which future DDR processes could be based, even though it had failed to attract large numbers of women. In theory, the Sierra Leone DDR process was designed to include women and children, "but while the program was effective in reaching out to male combatants, ultimately women and children were underserved"¹²⁸. Women did not participate in DDR for a number of specific reasons.

Ownership of a Firearm

One of the major reasons why women and girls did not participate in DDR in levels representative of their actual involvement in the fighting forces was because they did not meet the preconditions for participation. In interviews, 46 percent of women and girls who did not partake in the DDR program reported that they had not done so because they did not have a firearm to turn in – a requirement for participation in DDR during Phases I and II. The gendered misconception that all combatants owned a gun severely limited the ability of women ex-combatants to participate.

Many women and girls, particularly those in the Civil Defense Forces (CDF), had been required to turn in any weapons to male commanders when the cease-fire was announced. These weapons were then given to male fighters, or sold on the black market to men who would pose as ex-combatants in order to receive the cash and other benefits given by the DDR program. Also,

¹²⁷ (2006). *Integrated Demobilization, Disarmament and Reintegration Standards*. New York, United Nations: 772. 5.10, p. 4.

¹²⁸ Mazurana, D. and K. Carlson (2004). *From Combat to Community: Women and Girls of Sierra Leone*. S. N. Anderlini, *Women Waging Peace and The Policy Commission*: 46. p. 2.

many women did not possess a gun themselves, but had shared one from a communal source.¹²⁹ In the earlier phases of DDR, disarmament of combatants took precedence over demobilization and reintegration, resulting in a lack of female participation that would have detrimental effects on the overall results of the program.

Security at the Cantonment Facilities

DDR organizers did a poor job of reassuring vulnerable women that they would be kept safe from further violence in the cantonment sites. 21 percent of participants surveyed by Mazurana and Carlson reported that they had avoided DDR because they feared reprisals at the camp facilities. Many former CDF combatants felt that former RUF combatants would seek revenge if their affiliation became known. Women also felt that the poor security at the facilities and the large numbers of men there posed a threat to their safety.¹³⁰ DDR planners exhibited a lack of concern for women's special needs as victims of the conflict, providing few special protections for a highly vulnerable group.

Over-Classification

DDR policy during Phases I and II (1998 to 2000) explicitly excluded those women classified by the UN as 'wives', 'sex slaves' and 'camp followers' from participating in programming. DDR organizers often over-classified women into these ineligible roles despite proof that they had played multiple roles in the conflict. As stated in Chapter Two, nearly half of all women involved with the fighting forces received military training. Although the majority of women acted as 'wives' to male combatants, most reported also serving as cooks, porters or assistants to the sick and wounded.¹³¹ DDR policy was quick to simplify women's roles in the conflict and devalue their contribution to the conflict by classifying them in roles that did not qualify them for participation. Determining eligibility for DDR is explicitly gendered, and in order to include women, such decisions must be based on the recognition of women's diverse roles in conflict. The DDR policy's narrow understanding of women ex-combatants as dependants or 'bush wives' effectively excluded them from the benefits of DDR.

¹²⁹ Ibid. p. 20.

¹³⁰ Ibid. p. 20.

¹³¹ Ibid. p. 12.

Misconceptions

Some of the strongest discouragement that women received for participating in DDR came in the form of misconceptions about their participation in the conflict that were propagated by male leadership from their former factions, and which were never investigated by the government or the UN. First, the CDF leadership perpetuated a myth that women and girls had not been involved in its fighting forces. Women CDF ex-combatants took this as a direct attempt to thwart their participation in DDR. Women and girls felt particularly threatened and discouraged from participating in DDR when the former National Coordinator of the CDF, Samuel Hinga Norman, who had repeatedly asserted that women had not been involved in CDF forces, was elevated to Minister of Internal Security after the war. (The Special Court for Sierra Leone subsequently indicted Norman for committing crimes against humanity, including the use of child soldiers within the CDF and committing and inciting sexual violence against women.¹³²)

Second, there was a misconception that children who fought with the CDF were never separated from their families; only children who UNICEF classified as 'separated' from their guardians were eligible for certain benefits, including participation in DDR. However, there is ample evidence that many children in the CDF were, in fact, separated from their families, and therefore should have been eligible for participation.¹³³ In order to participate in DDR, girls who had fought with the CDF had to thus overcome two misconceptions: that there had been no females fighting in the forces, and that they, as children, had not been separated from their families. The profound effects of these misconceptions are evidenced in that DDR processed only 7 girls who had fought with CDF, even though there had been an estimated 1,772 girls

¹³² Coulter, C. (2005). The Post War Moment: Female Fighters in Sierra Leone. *Migration Studies Working Paper No. 22*. Johannesburg, South Africa, University of the Witwatersrand: 19. p. 21, and MacKay, S. and D. Mazurana (2004). *Where are the Girls? Girls in Fighting Forces in Northern Uganda, Sierra Leone and Mozambique: Their Lives During and After War*. Montreal, International Center for Human Rights and Democratic Governance: 75. p. 95.

¹³³ Mazurana, D. and K. Carlson (2004). *From Combat to Community: Women and Girls of Sierra Leone*. S. N. Anderlini, *Women Waging Peace and The Policy Commission*: 46. p. 21

fighting in the CDF. This statistic reveals that only 0.4 percent of girls who had fought with the CDF participated in DDR.¹³⁴

Cultural Barriers

Gender and DDR scholar Vanessa Farr noted that women ex-combatants are likely to become even more marginalized than other women during the peacebuilding process, because they occupy positions that cannot “be easily reconciled with predominant gender ideologies”¹³⁵. Although conflict may have opened up opportunities for women to act in ‘non-traditional’ ways, the end of conflict most often means a reversion to conservative values that may ostracize women ex-combatants.¹³⁶ Women who were a part of military groups in Sierra Leone often avoided DDR out of shame for their involvement in the conflict and fear that their actions would be discovered. Women ex-combatants with the RUF were branded as ‘rebels’ and faced far higher rates of community rejection for their participation in the conflict than their male cohorts.¹³⁷

In interviews, some women reported being discouraged by their ‘bush husbands’ from participating because it was seen as culturally inappropriate for a woman to publicly disarm. According to Chris Coulter, “It was perceived as negative for women to disarm, as it would make it more difficult for them to be accepted back into their communities, and it would also make it more difficult for them to get married, as they were told that no man wanted a ‘rebel woman’”.¹³⁸ Reintegration was particularly difficult for women who were known ex-combatants because of cultural pressures that were beyond the control of those planning and implementing the DDR program. However, the success of the DDR process required that it be sensitive to these

¹³⁴ Ibid. p. 20 and MacKay, S. and D. Mazurana (2004). *Where are the Girls? Girls in Fighting Forces in Northern Uganda, Sierra Leone and Mozambique: Their Lives During and After War*. Montreal, International Center for Human Rights and Democratic Governance: 75. p. 99.

¹³⁵ Farr, V. (2002). *Gendering Demilitarization as a Peacebuilding Tool*. Bonn, Bonn International Center for Conversion: 49.

¹³⁶ Coulter, C. (2005). *The Post War Moment: Female Fighters in Sierra Leone*. *Cultural Anthropology*. Uppsala, Sweden, Uppsala University: 19.

¹³⁷ MacKay, S. and D. Mazurana (2004). *Where are the Girls? Girls in Fighting Forces in Northern Uganda, Sierra Leone and Mozambique: Their Lives During and After War*. Montreal, International Center for Human Rights and Democratic Governance: 75. p. 37.

¹³⁸ Coulter, C. (2006). *Reconciliation or Revenge: Narratives of Fear and Shame among Female Ex-combatants in Sierra Leone. Being a Bush Wife*. Uppsala, Sweden, Uppsala University. p. 5.

cultural pressures and find ways to encourage women to participate. Women ex-combatants require gender-specific policies and encouragement beyond that of their male counterparts.

The Gendered Effects of DDR in Sierra Leone

The UN and the government of Sierra Leone's androcentric conception of 'combatant' excluded women and girls from participation in one of the most critical peacebuilding mechanisms. The strict classifications of individuals as 'combatants' or 'non-combatants', and the blindness of the leadership to their misunderstandings about female combatants were extremely prohibitive to women's participation. Neither the international community nor the local government acknowledged the key role that women and girls had played in the conflict, devaluing their experiences and overlooking their potential contributions to DDR efforts.

In addition, the government of Sierra Leone and the UN invested the majority of DDR resources in collecting weapons from male combatants, showing little concern for the participation of women ex-combatants without arms to turn in. The DDR program did little to find alternative ways to reach out to the known population of women ex-combatants and made only a weak attempt to include them in Phase III, by allowing a group of combatants to turn in a single weapon.

Mazurana and Carlson warned that the DDR processes that follow the example set by Sierra Leone will "risk losing tremendous social capital that could be utilized for post-conflict reconstruction"¹³⁹. In 2002, disaffected youth and adolescent ex-combatants who remained mobilized rioted and attacked a number of Interim Care Centers, where youth ex-combatants under age 17 were supposed to receive reintegration training. Social workers in the Centers reported that women and girls were sometimes the leaders of these protests. Mazurana and Carlson reported, "Without support or care from their former 'partners' or 'husbands,' their own families, the community, or the state, many of the young women – particularly those with children born as a result of their captivity – resorted to civil unrest as a means of accessing basic

¹³⁹ Mazurana, D. and K. Carlson (2004). *From Combat to Community: Women and Girls of Sierra Leone*. S. N. Anderlini, *Women Waging Peace and The Policy Commission*: 46. p. 15.

goods for the survival of their children”¹⁴⁰. Mazurana and Carlson also reported an increase in female militia activities in 2002, leading them to conclude that these women had also resorted to armed violence as a means for survival¹⁴¹. Roving armed militia groups from Sierra Leone, many of which included women, have contributed to the conflicts in neighboring Guinea, Liberia and Cote D’Ivoire.

Economic reintegration has proven a challenge for women ex-combatants, as prevailing cultural views discourage women from seeking financial independence from male relatives. A significant number of women ex-combatants have turned to prostitution in order to support themselves and their families. During an interview conducted by the Women’s Commission in 2002, a former combatant adolescent girl told researchers, “No one provides for us, which is why many go into prostitution. This is why I go myself”¹⁴². Prostitution, in turn, has further entrenched poverty and led to an increase in the spread of HIV/AIDS in the communities where prostitutes work.¹⁴³ The children of these ex-combatant women who succumb to disease will grow up orphans, creating another generation of disaffected youth.

One particularly vulnerable group that shows the disastrous effects of gender-insensitive DDR is those women who had been ‘bush wives’ (informal sexual partners and service providers) to male combatants. It has been very difficult for these women to return to their homes and families because they are seen as unfit to marry. Many of them now provide for themselves and their dependents through prostitution.¹⁴⁴ The UN Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women published a report in 2002 which implored the government of Sierra Leone to “enable those women and girls who were forced to become the sexual partners of members of the rebel forces

¹⁴⁰ Ibid. p. 18.

¹⁴¹ Ibid. p. 5.

¹⁴² (2002). Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration, and Gender-based Violence in Sierra Leone. Precious Resources: Adolescents in the Reconstruction of Sierra Leone. New York, Women’s Commission for Refugee Women and Children. p. 10.

¹⁴³ Mazurana, D. and K. Carlson (2004). From Combat to Community: Women and Girls of Sierra Leone. S. N. Anderlini, Women Waging Peace and The Policy Commission: 46. p. 3, 26.

¹⁴⁴ Coulter, C. (2006). Reconciliation or Revenge: Narratives of Fear and Shame among Female Ex-combatants in Sierra Leone. Being a Bush Wife. Uppsala, Sweden, Uppsala University. p. 6.

(so-called ‘bush wives’) to leave demobilized combatants, if they wish to”¹⁴⁵. Furthermore, “Rehabilitation programmes must take into account the wide extent of sexual assault and rape and formulate programmes to address the specific needs of survivors”¹⁴⁶.

With proper assistance from gender-sensitive DDR, these ‘bush wives’ might have had some hope to succeed without resorting to violence or crime. Instead, the DDR program did little to support women and girls leaving abusive relationships, and often did just the opposite. During Phases I and II of DDR, women classified as ‘dependents’ were barred from participation. During Phase III, loans were available for the female ‘dependents’ of male combatants, but for a woman to access these loans she had to apply with a man present who was willing to identify her as his wife. A woman could not access the funding alone, no matter how many children she was providing for. If women had been allowed to apply for loans alone, it could have allowed them to abdicate these relationships – but senior DDR officials never considered this, instead believing that most women wanted to be with their ‘husbands’. For women who had been forced into marriage, DDR provided no means to escape or be reintegrated into their communities.¹⁴⁷

By neglecting women in the demanding effort to demilitarize a highly militarized state, the government of Sierra Leone and the United Nations failed to address an important aspect of insecurity in the country and the region. It was critical that militarized women be involved in the DDR process, in order to properly train them on how to act as civilians and to seek out employment outside of violent, and criminal activity. Instead, the women whom DDR ignored have turned to destructive behavior including prostitution and violence to support themselves and their families, and gender-oppressive behavior has been further entrenched.

¹⁴⁵ Coomaraswamy, R. (2002). United Nations Report of the Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women in Sierra Leone, *Integration of the Human Rights of Women and the Gender Perspective: Violence against Women*. New York, United Nations. p. 28.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid. p. 3.

¹⁴⁷ Mazurana, D. and K. Carlson (2004). *From Combat to Community: Women and Girls of Sierra Leone*. S. N. Anderlini, *Women Waging Peace and The Policy Commission*: 46. p. 3 and 18.

Exclusion of Women in the Greater African Context

DDR in Sierra Leone is not the only such process to have excluded women. This portion of the chapter will contextualize DDR in Sierra Leone (1997-2002) through an examination of programs in Mozambique (1994-1997) and Liberia (2003-2004). Women ex-combatants' experiences in different historical and geographic contexts will attest to the difficulties surrounding women's participation in DDR that crosses borders, conflicts and time periods. An analysis of DDR in these countries also shows that some lessons and best practices have been carried over between experiences, and that there is hope for improvement.

Mozambique

In 1994 the government of Mozambique began a demobilization program for combatants from both sides of the civil war, which had raged from 1976 to 1992. The three-year program processed 92,881 total combatants, of which 1,380 were women.¹⁴⁸ This low rate of participation, with women representing less than 2 percent of demobilized combatants, conceals the fact that women were present in large – although unknown – numbers in the fighting forces. According to MacKay and Mazurana, “Although many Mozambicans were aware of the presence of girls and young women in both forces, international agencies tended to overlook them. This carried through into DDR programs that not only excluded them, but, in some instances, contributed to violations of their human rights”¹⁴⁹.

DDR in Mozambique was geared towards male ex-combatants, with only male combatants receiving an 18-month cash resettlement allowance, and only male clothing available for combatants being resettled.¹⁵⁰ Some women who participated in DDR received job training, but only in traditionally female jobs such as sewing and secretarial work. Many women who

¹⁴⁸ Baden, S. (1997). *Post-Conflict Mozambique: Women's Special Situation*, Population Issues and Gender Perspectives. Brighton, UK, BRIDGE (development - gender), Institute of Development Studies, University of Sussex: 155.

¹⁴⁹ MacKay, S. and D. Mazurana (2004). *Where are the Girls? Girls in Fighting Forces in Northern Uganda, Sierra Leone and Mozambique: Their Lives During and After War*. Montreal, International Center for Human Rights and Democratic Governance: 75.

¹⁵⁰ Baden, S. (1997). *Post-Conflict Mozambique: Women's Special Situation*, Population Issues and Gender Perspectives. Brighton, UK, BRIDGE (development - gender), Institute of Development Studies, University of Sussex: 155.

participated in DDR were forced to remain with their captor 'husbands' in demobilization camps and were sent with these 'husbands' to resettle.¹⁵¹ Women's special needs for DDR were not differentiated from those of male participants, making women's participation in the process difficult and their gains from participation minimal.

In response to complaints that the demobilization process was ignoring women, the veteran's organization AMODEG (Association of Former Soldiers) created a women's branch. The branch lobbied with some success for women's entitlement to resettlement allowances, proper clothing for women, psychological support, and the recognition that 'combatants' included women, children and the disabled.¹⁵² Despite the moderate improvements that AMODEG was able to make, DDR in Mozambique failed to incorporate women, both as combatants and as the dependents of male combatants. The design of the DDR program showed concern for economic aspects of demobilization and reintegration, rather than on the broader psychological, social and spiritual aspects. Furthermore, reintegration was designed for 'combatants' as a homogenous group, without any consideration for gender or age. The failure to address gender differences, according to Sally Baden, was because female soldiers "were not perceived as a security threat and thus their needs were not given priority"¹⁵³.

DDR in Mozambique, to an extent greater than DDR in Sierra Leone, failed to consider gender differences with disastrous consequences. Providing meaningful security to women ex-combatants continues to pose a challenge in post-war Mozambique because of the women's ongoing poverty, lack of education and employment. In many instances, women's service in the armed groups prohibited them from receiving an education or skills training. These women have now been excluded from a second chance at these opportunities because they were not involved in post-war reintegration programs. According to MacKay and Mazurana, Mozambican women's "lack of adequate employment directly contributes to their inability to send their own children to

¹⁵¹ MacKay, S. and D. Mazurana (2004). *Where are the Girls? Girls in Fighting Forces in Northern Uganda, Sierra Leone and Mozambique: Their Lives During and After War*. Montreal, International Center for Human Rights and Democratic Governance: 75.

¹⁵² Bouta, T. (2005). *Gender and Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration: Building Blocs for Dutch Policy*. The Hague, Netherlands Institute of International Relations "Clingendael".

¹⁵³ Baden, S. (1997). *Post-Conflict Mozambique: Women's Special Situation, Population Issues and Gender Perspectives*. Brighton, UK, BRIDGE (development - gender), Institute of Development Studies, University of Sussex: 155.

school, thus continuing the cycle of poverty”¹⁵⁴.

Liberia

DDR in Liberia shows a significant progression from the processes in Mozambique and Sierra Leone. DDR there took place shortly after that in Sierra Leone, from 2003 to 2004. The conflict in Liberia, closely linked to the conflict in Sierra Leone, included a very large number of women combatants, perhaps as many as 25,000 – more than 20 percent of all combatants¹⁵⁵. In 2003, UN Secretary General Kofi Annan mandated that DDR in Liberia include special programs to address the gender-specific needs of female ex-combatants, as well as the wives and widows of former combatants. This high-profile attention to women ex-combatants from the very start of the program shows vast improvements over Mozambique and Sierra Leone, where women were only considered as afterthoughts.

The DDR process in Liberia process carried over many gender practices from Sierra Leone, and paid particular attention to women’s specific needs as combatants. In 2004, UNIFEM recognized the DDR process in Liberia as showing marked improvements over other programs in terms of gender-aware policies.¹⁵⁶ Policies stipulated that women, men, boys and girls were all to be housed separately in the cantonment centers, with separate hygiene facilities. Women and girls were to receive reproductive health care and education. Special counseling was to be made available for survivors of sexual violence. Human rights and women’s rights training were to be provided to both men and women. The presence of progressive policies such as these shows a marked improvement over DDR programming in Mozambique and Sierra Leone, which rarely considered the importance of services aimed directly at women.¹⁵⁷

Despite these advances in policy, UNIFEM found that often such policies were not carried over

¹⁵⁴ MacKay, S. and D. Mazurana (2004). *Where are the Girls? Girls in Fighting Forces in Northern Uganda, Sierra Leone and Mozambique: Their Lives During and After War*. Montreal, International Center for Human Rights and Democratic Governance: 75. p. 112.

¹⁵⁵ Douglas, S., V. Farr, et al. (2004). *Getting it Right, Doing it Right: Gender and Demobilization, Disarmament and Reintegration*. S. Douglas and F. Hill. New York, United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM). p. 9.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid. p. 9.

¹⁵⁷ (2004). *Information on DDRR Process for Women*. Monrovia, Liberia, Humanitarian Information Centre for Liberia.

into practice. One example of this is the cantonment facilities, where women were to be housed separately from men. At one site, although the women's facility was separated from men's facility by a significant bamboo fence, there was only one path out of the entire site, which required that women walk through the men's area. The program's coordinator for the region acknowledged, "When the women walk through this place, the men can be giving them a difficult time, they will say things to the women, and they will complain to the staff that they should be able to get to the women, especially at night"¹⁵⁸. Examples such as this show that policy advances do not necessarily translate to improvements in practice.

In 2003, only a few months into the program, the UN was forced to temporarily halt DDR, due to a lack of financial resources and preparedness at the cantonment facilities, which had led to rioting. The UN enlisted the help of a Liberian women's organization, the Women in Peacebuilding Network (WIPNET) to calm combatants, provide essential services, and care for underage combatants. WIPNET representative Leymah Gbowee later recounted to the UN that women had not been adequately consulted in the planning of DDR, and that in the end, civil society consultation and the involvement of women were critical to its success. Although a number of positive lessons had been carried over from Sierra Leone, she noted that, "The best practices that were imported to Liberia from Sierra Leone were not always relevant to the Liberian context, a fact that was overlooked as a result of the lack of community involvement and consultation"¹⁵⁹.

DDR programming in Liberia processed a total of 102,193 people – more than twice the originally estimated number of combatants. Of these, 68,952 (67 percent) were adult males, 22,020 (22 percent) were adult females, 8,704 (9 percent) were male children and 2,517 (2 percent) were female children. A study done by the International Labor Office, published in 2006, suggests that unknown large numbers of women and girls did not participate in DDR for reasons similar to those in Sierra Leone: fear of social repercussions for involvement, concern for safety in the camp sites, obligations to family, and reluctance to return home, among

¹⁵⁸ Douglas, S., V. Farr, et al. (2004). *Getting it Right, Doing it Right: Gender and Demobilization, Disarmament and Reintegration*. S. Douglas and F. Hill. New York, United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM). p. 16

¹⁵⁹ (2005). *Women Building Peace Through Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration*. Beijing + 10 Review Conference, United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM).

others.¹⁶⁰

Conclusions

The evidence in this chapter has validated that women in Sierra Leone were excluded from DDR because of a narrow and conventional definition of 'combatant' that did not recognize the various roles they played in the conflict. Additionally, the exclusion of women was based on the false assumption that male combatants were more of a direct threat to peace and security in the country than women, and thus required the vast majority of resources to disarm, demobilize and reintegrate. These key false beliefs resulted in the long-term inability of the DDR program to provide the majority of citizens with lasting and meaningful security – beyond the prevention of a reversion to conflict.

Disarmament, demobilization and reintegration are the first steps that a healing nation takes towards creating an enduring peace. In Sierra Leone, women ex-combatants could have been a valuable resource for peacebuilding – but were instead ignored at both the policy and implementation levels of the DDR process. Chapter Four will continue this examination of women ex-combatants in peacebuilding, looking at another step in the long process of towards peace – the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Sierra Leone.

¹⁶⁰ Specht, I. (2006). *Red Shoes: Experiences of Girl-Combatants in Liberia*. Geneva, International Labour Office Programme on Crisis Response and Reconstruction: 135. pp. 87 – 92.

Chapter Four: Women Ex-Combatants and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission

Chapter Four is an examination of women ex-combatants' participation in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Sierra Leone (SLTRC, or TRC unless otherwise specified). In order to provide context for the Sierra Leone TRC, the chapter will first examine the theoretical roles of a truth commission as a transitional justice and peacebuilding mechanism and offer a gender perspective on these roles. The SLTRC must also be placed in the broader historical context of truth commissions worldwide, particularly as relates to its predecessor, the South African TRC. The chapter will examine the evolution of gender practices between the two commissions and investigate the SLTRC's gender policies and their success in attracting women's participation.

As with DDR, the lack of women ex-combatant's participation in the Sierra Leone TRC can be attributed to two major misconceptions on the part of those planning and implementing the Commission. First, the use of a simplified, masculine understanding of a 'combatant' that excluded feminine narratives and women's dual identities as 'victims' and 'perpetrators'; and second, the belief that women ex-combatants were insignificant contributors to the peacebuilding process and therefore not deserving of scarce resources. These misconceptions served to discourage women from participating in the TRC, to an extent even greater than DDR. This chapter also analyzes the negative effect the exclusion of women had on the achievements of the TRC as a peacebuilding mechanism.

The Truth Commission in a Theoretical and Historical Global Context

Transitional justice, as discussed in Chapter One, is a critical part of creating sustainable peace. Transitional justice provides a post-conflict country with an opportunity to heal old wounds through reconciliation, seek accountability for past crimes, and set the stage for a new dispensation of democratic rule. There are various mechanisms available for coping with a country's post-conflict transitional justice needs – one of which is the truth commission. Post-conflict countries choose to institute truth commissions for many different reasons – among

them, to seek reconciliation for the crimes of the past, to prepare for prosecutions, or to distance the new government from the previous regime.¹⁶¹ Other countries, such as Sierra Leone, have been encouraged by the international community to institute a truth commission. In Sierra Leone, the TRC was set up as a part of the Lomé Peace Accord. The United Nations and other international organizations persuaded the parties involved to agree to the creation of a truth commission in order to provide some accountability for human rights crimes that had been granted amnesty under the Accord.¹⁶²

Priscilla Hayner, in her groundbreaking book on truth commissions, lays out the five basic aims of a truth commission: to discover, clarify and formally acknowledge past abuses; to respond to the specific needs of victims; to contribute to justice and accountability; to outline institutional responsibility and recommend reforms; and to promote reconciliation and reduce conflict over the past”¹⁶³. Truth commissions tend to be ‘victim-centered’ processes, with those who suffered human rights violations coming forward to tell their stories in public. In conflicts where women are very often the victims of human rights violations, the participation of women is critical to the success of a truth commission.

However, gender is often overlooked in truth commission processes – very few commissions have examined how gender dynamics influence a conflict, or how women and sexual minorities experience conflict differently from men. Broad criticism of truth commissions on this subject has led to many changes in the way recent commissions have incorporated gender. There are three basic approaches to incorporating gender into a truth commission. First, a commission may attempt to mainstream gender into all aspects of its work. ‘Gender mainstreaming’ advocates argue that this approach allows gender to become an organizing principle in the commission’s daily work, from statement collection, to hearings, to report writing. Critics argue that gender mainstreaming often makes gender invisible because it is no longer a focal point and there is no staff designated to address gender-specific issues.¹⁶⁴

¹⁶¹ Hayner, P. (2002). *Unspeakable Truths: Facing the Challenge of Truth Commissions*. London, Routledge. p. 24.

¹⁶² ICTJ. (2007). "Sierra Leone." Retrieved 28 January 2008, from <http://www.ictj.org/en/where/region1/141.html>.

¹⁶³ Hayner, P. (2002). *Unspeakable Truths: Facing the Challenge of Truth Commissions*. London, Routledge. p. 24.

¹⁶⁴ Nesiah, V. (2006). Truth Commissions and Gender; Principles, Policies, and Procedures. *Gender Justice Series*. New York, International Center for Transitional Justice: 64. p. 3.

Second, a number of commissions have sought to address gender issues by creating a gender unit to deal specifically with these issues. Gender units may bring special attention to the plight of women, but they also run the risk of isolating gender issues from the rest of the commission's work, referred to as 'gender cabineting'. Third, a commission may choose to integrate both of the previous approaches by mainstreaming gender into all of the commission's operations as well as making gender the focal point of a specific unit.¹⁶⁵ This was the approach used by the Sierra Leone TRC.

By incorporating gender to the best of its abilities, a truth commission has the ability to bring to light women's experiences during the conflict and the role that gender played in human rights abuses. Consequently, this allows a truth commission to make recommendations that have the power to bring about a transformation of gender relations in the country.

Understanding the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission

The first large-scale truth commissions took place in South America – in Argentina (1983-1984), Chile (1990-1991) and El Salvador (1992-1993). However, it was not until the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission (1995-2000) that a truth commission came to the center of international attention. The South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission (SATRC) received acclaim as a result of its widely broadcast public hearings and compelling individualized amnesty.¹⁶⁶ The SATRC went on to become the model for a number of subsequent truth commissions elsewhere, including the commission in Sierra Leone. For this reason, it is important to understand the workings and failures of the SATRC.

The SATRC was comprised of three major committees: the Amnesty Committee, the Human Rights Violations Committee (HRVC), and the Reparations Committee. The Amnesty Committee took applications for amnesty for politically motivated human rights violations that were committed between March 1, 1960 and December 5, 1993. If the Committee determined that the crime met the criteria for amnesty, there would be no punishment for that act for the individual who came forward. There were over 7,000 applications for amnesty, but most senior

¹⁶⁵ Ibid. p. 4.

¹⁶⁶ Hayner, P. (2002). Unspeakable Truths: Facing the Challenge of Truth Commissions. London, Routledge. p. 4.

members of the apartheid government did not apply and continued to deny crimes. Those who did not apply or did not receive amnesty faced the threat of prosecutions, but these threats have been slow to materialize. The Committee granted amnesty in 568 cases and refused amnesty in 5,287.¹⁶⁷

The HRVC, with sessions often broadcast on television and radio, offered an opportunity for victims of human rights violations between 1960 and 1993 to share their experiences with the public. The Committee heard testimony from over 21,000 victims and witnesses, 2,000 of whom appeared in public hearings. The object of these testimonies was to “promote national ‘healing’ and individual catharsis, and to assist the individual victims to confront and transcend their trauma”¹⁶⁸. The HRVC would start the healing process for the victims by acknowledging what was done to them by the state.¹⁶⁹ The third committee, the Reparations Committee made recommendations to the state about the compensation these victims should receive for the crimes visited upon them (the government was not legally compelled to follow these recommendations, and has yet to pay the recommended amount).

Gender and the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission

Despite its attempts at a ‘victim-centered’ approach, women victims were noticeably absent from the SATRC’s proceedings. Although equal numbers of men and women testified before the HRVC, women usually described the sufferings of men, while men described their own experiences. Women who had actively opposed apartheid rarely testified. Women accounted for 54 percent of witnesses, but 79 percent of women testified about violations committed against men. By contrast, men testified only 8 percent of the time about women’s experiences. 14 percent of women’s stories were regarding their own experiences. As a result of these patterns, Commissioners and the media frequently referred to women as ‘secondary witnesses’¹⁷⁰.

¹⁶⁷ (2001). South Africa: Human Rights Developments, Human Rights Watch.

¹⁶⁸ Allen, J. (1999). "Balancing Justice and Social Unity: Political Theory and the Idea of a Truth and Reconciliation Commission." *University of Toronto Law Journal* 49(3).316.

¹⁶⁹ Berat, L. and Y. Shain (1995). "Retribution or Truth-Telling in South Africa? Legacies of the Transitional Phase." *Law & Social Inquiry* 20(1).p. 186.

¹⁷⁰ Hayner, P. (2002). *Unspeakable Truths: Facing the Challenge of Truth Commissions*. London, Routledge. p. 99.

In 1996, before the TRC even began its hearings, Beth Goldblatt and Sheila Meintjes of the Gender Research Project at the Center for Applied Legal Studies at the University of the Witwatersrand organized a workshop on gender and the TRC. The participants included lawyers, psychologists, representatives of NGOs, members of the Provincial Legislature and, most importantly, several of the SATRC's Commissioners. Goldblatt and Meintjes submitted the group's recommendations to the SATRC on how to better incorporate women:

We suggest that the TRC actively rejects a gender-neutral approach towards its analysis of evidence and in all other aspects of its brief. This means that gender must be incorporated into the TRCs policy framework, for without this framework, gender issues, and women's voices in particular, will not be heard and accurately recorded.¹⁷¹

Further recommendations included allowing women to testify confidentially, in groups, before only female commissioners and statement takers, and in private hearings closed to the public.¹⁷² Participants in the workshop were aware of the shame involved for many women in speaking about sexual violence for many women; there is "a prevailing cultural view that sexual abuse is shameful and cannot be divulged"¹⁷³. They hoped that their suggestions would allow more women to come forward and testify, and to make the history of sexual abuse in South Africa a part of the nation's new identity.

Meintjes subsequently wrote that her report with Goldblatt was received positively by the SATRC. Several of the report's recommendations were eventually followed, most notably the holding of women's hearings. Although they received a positive response early on, Meintjes admitted that the final outcome of the SATRC was disappointing. She complained that due to the hasty schedule of the Commission, it was inevitable that a truly gendered perspective would not be developed. Instead of creating an overall gender-analysis, the SATRC's final report included only a single chapter on the experiences of women. She wrote, "The TRC did not understand, nor hear, what we had said. Our research essentially fell on deaf ears!"¹⁷⁴

¹⁷¹ Goldblatt, B. and S. Meintjes (1996). *Gender and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission: A Submission to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission*.

¹⁷² *ibid.*

¹⁷³ *ibid.*

¹⁷⁴ Meintjes, S. (2004). *Peace Work: Women, Armed Conflict, and Negotiation*. New Delhi, Women Unlimited. p. 270.

The South African TRC, despite its numerous downfalls – gender related and otherwise – became the model for the Sierra Leone TRC. The Sierra Leone TRC lacked the South African TRC’s authority to grant amnesty, but had a similar mission of victim participation and empowerment. The following section will examine the ways in which the Sierra Leone TRC learned lessons from the South African TRC and implemented positive gender policies in the wake of South Africa’s mistakes.

The Sierra Leone Truth and Reconciliation Commission

The Sierra Leone TRC was instituted as a part of the Lomé Peace Accord, which stated that the TRC was “to address impunity, break the cycle of violence, provide a forum for both the victims and the perpetrators of human rights violations to tell their story, and to get a clear picture of the past in order to facilitate genuine healing and reconciliation”¹⁷⁵. The TRC was formally founded through an act of parliament in February 2000, and its commissioners were inaugurated in July 2002. The TRC Act stated the Commission was charged with the following tasks:

To investigate and report on the causes, nature and extent of the violations and abuses [related to the conflict in Sierra Leone] to the fullest degree possible, including their antecedents, the context in which those violations and abuses were the result of deliberate planning, policy or authorization by any government, group or individual, and the role of both internal and external factors in the conflict.

To work to help restore the dignity of victims and promote reconciliation by providing an opportunity for victims to give an account of the violations and abuses suffered and for perpetrators to relate their experiences, and by creating a climate which fosters constructive interchange between victims and perpetrators, giving special attention to the subject of sexual abuses and to the experiences of children within the armed conflict.¹⁷⁶

In order to do this, the Commission traveled the country and took statements from victims and perpetrators about violations that occurred as a part of the conflict. The SLTRC was charged with investigating “violations and abuses related to the armed conflict in Sierra Leone”, which gave it a much larger scope than the South African TRC, which only investigated narrowly

¹⁷⁵ (1999). Lomé Peace Accord. G. o. S. L. a. t. R. U. F. o. S. Leone. Lomé, Togo.

¹⁷⁶ Leone, G. o. S. (2000). Truth and Reconciliation Act. Part III.

defined “gross violations of human rights”¹⁷⁷. In the first step of the process, Commissioners collected 7,706 statements from Sierra Leoneans who were categorized as victims, perpetrators, witnesses and those testifying on behalf of others. Those who belonged to more than one category were able to indicate this on their statement form.¹⁷⁸

As the second component of the SLTRC’s work, Commissioners held weeklong hearings in each of the country’s 12 districts. Victims, perpetrators and witnesses who had previously given statements were invited to come to the district’s headquarter town to share their testimonies with the TRC and the community. In each district there was one day of closed hearings, where children and victims of sexual violence could testify in private. Perpetrators and ex-combatants who wished to remain anonymous could also testify in secrecy at closed hearings.¹⁷⁹ The Commission also held a series of special thematic hearings in Freetown on the thirteen topics including one on women and girls.¹⁸⁰

Attendance at the initial hearings in Freetown was sparse, but audience numbers increased as the Commission traveled to areas of the country where the most violations occurred. Hearings began on April 14, 2003 and concluded on August 5, 2003. The final report notes that the Commission was successful in allowing Sierra Leoneans to speak out about their experiences, many of them for the first time. The hearings also, “enabled the Commission to catalyse a public debate about such issues as the causes of the conflict, the role of institutions and what needs to be done to transform Sierra Leone”¹⁸¹.

Gender and the Sierra Leone Truth and Reconciliation Commission

The South African TRC and the truth commissions in Guatemala and Peru had informally incorporated gender into their mandates, but the SLTRC took this a step further. A report by the International Center for Transitional Justice (ICTJ) on gender in truth commissions commended

¹⁷⁷ Truth and Reconciliation Commission, S. L. (2004). *Witness to Truth: Report of the Sierra Leone Truth and Reconciliation Commission, Volume One. Witness to Truth: Report of the Sierra Leone Truth and Reconciliation Commission*. Accra, Ghana, Sierra Leone Truth and Reconciliation Commission. 1: 247. Chapter 1, paras 35 and 36.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid. Chapter 4, paras 108, 113-114.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid. Chapter 4, paras 196 and 197.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid. Chapter 4, paras 198 and 199.

¹⁸¹ Ibid. Chapter 4, para 195.

the Sierra Leone TRC for formally incorporating gender into its mandate and identifying the topic as a critical avenue of investigation.¹⁸² The final report of the SLTRC includes a chapter that focuses specifically on the experiences of women during the conflict. The chapter begins by explaining what special steps the SLTRC took to ensure that women would participate in its proceedings to the fullest extent possible. In formulating its policies, the Commission was “driven by several imperative needs: to protect the victims; to engender an atmosphere of trust in the Commission; to observe issues of confidentiality; to create a safe environment for women; and to ensure that women and girls would not be ‘retraumatised’ or ‘revictimised’ in the process”¹⁸³.

The Commission was determined to mainstream gender into all of its activities, as well as create policies directly aimed at women. One such policy was to provide women victims with women statement-takers, who had been trained to deal with those traumatized by sexual abuse. The UN Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) and the Urgent Action Fund for Women’s Human Rights facilitated these trainings, which were also mandatory for all Commissioners. The training sessions focused on topics such as the international law pertaining to sexual violence, methodology for interviewing rape victims, and issues relating to the support and protection of women witnesses.¹⁸⁴ More than 40 percent of all statement-takers were women. Furthermore, the presence of male relatives of the statement-givers was discouraged at the statement taking, unless insisted upon by the victim. The woman victim also had the right to decide if her statement would be made public or remain confidential.¹⁸⁵

The Commission recognized the importance of giving voice to women victims who might be afraid to testify about their abuse in public, and decided early on to hold closed hearings for

¹⁸² Nesiah, V. (2006). Truth Commissions and Gender; Principles, Policies, and Procedures. *Gender Justice Series*. New York, International Center for Transitional Justice: 64.

¹⁸³ Truth and Reconciliation Commission, S. L. (2004). Witness to Truth: Report of the Sierra Leone Truth and Reconciliation Commission, Volume Three B. *Witness to Truth: Report of the Sierra Leone Truth and Reconciliation Commission*. Accra, Ghana, Sierra Leone Truth and Reconciliation Commission. **3B**: 514. Chapter 3, para 16.

¹⁸⁴ Nesiah, V. (2006). Truth Commissions and Gender; Principles, Policies, and Procedures. *Gender Justice Series*. New York, International Center for Transitional Justice: 64. p. 12. And Nowrojee

¹⁸⁵ Truth and Reconciliation Commission, S. L. (2004). Witness to Truth: Report of the Sierra Leone Truth and Reconciliation Commission, Volume Three B. *Witness to Truth: Report of the Sierra Leone Truth and Reconciliation Commission*. Accra, Ghana, Sierra Leone Truth and Reconciliation Commission. **3B**: 514. Chapter 3, para 17.

victims of sexual abuse. These hearings would be held *in camera* and would be presided over and attended only by female Commissioners and staff. The Commission also provided the trained counselors to brief and debrief the women who testified at the special hearings. The women were provided with food, drink and medical assistance as well as transportation to and from the hearings venues and, where necessary, overnight accommodation.¹⁸⁶ These were important considerations, given that many of the women made significant sacrifices to spend a day away from their homes, families and livelihoods testifying before the TRC.

On May 22, 2003 the TRC opened a three day Special Thematic Hearing on Women with a march through the center of Freetown. The march was led by the Deputy Minister of the Ministry of Social Welfare, Gender and Children's rights who was accompanied by the Commission's staff, women activists, women's organizations and hundreds of supporters.¹⁸⁷ The march brought tremendous support and solidarity to the proceedings. Gender and transitional justice scholar Binaifer Nowrojee was present at the proceedings and described them in her writings on the TRC:

Morning traffic came to a halt as women marched en masse on the road... Accompanied by several school marching bands playing rousing music, women walked with signs aloft that read "No Violence Against Women" and "Justice for Women." Women continued to join the march as it approached the TRC hall. By the time the hearings began, women packed the large auditorium, demonstrating solidarity with the rape victims and others who would speak about the atrocities committed against women and girls during the decade-long civil war in Sierra Leone. Gasps and tears could be heard throughout the session as rape victims, hidden behind a screen, recounted their harrowing experiences to the commissioners. The voices of victims were finally being heard by the nation.¹⁸⁸

The Sierra Leone TRC was able to implement policies that gender activists had recommended as afterthoughts in South Africa and other previous truth commissions. The Commission took seriously its mandate to investigate sexual crimes. Not only was there great foresight in creating gender policies, much of the international community has also applauded the efficacy of their implementation. Nowrojee, a harsh critic of the International Criminal Court for Rwanda and its

¹⁸⁶ Ibid. Chapter 3, paras 24-26.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸⁸ Nowrojee, B. (2005). "Making the Invisible War Crime Visible: Post-Conflict Justice for Sierra Leone's Rape Victims." *Harvard Human Rights Journal*(18). p. 86.

gender-crimes policy implementation, praised the SLTRC, writing, "...the TRC commissioners... deserve credit for their careful and sensitive efforts to seek some justice and accountability—however limited—for the thousands of rape victims in Sierra Leone. While it is too early to know the precise impact of their efforts, it is an important first step that both institutions have made women's experiences visible and that they have taken concrete steps to protect rape victims"¹⁸⁹.

Women gave approximately one third of the nearly 8,000 statements that the SLTRC collected. More than 1,300 statements were related to sexual violence, and 800 statements came from women who spoke about their own rapes; more than half of these rapes were gang rapes.¹⁹⁰ These statistics appear to show that the SLTRC was victorious in its efforts to have women testify – however, the number of women who testified pales in comparison to the estimated number of total women victims. Human Rights Watch estimated that 50,000 women had been sexually violated in the conflict.¹⁹¹ If this figure is accurate, only 2.6 percent of female victims of sexual violence testified before the TRC.

Nonetheless, given the circumstances, the SLTRC made a tremendous effort to include female victims, and made many positive gains as a result. One of the major purposes of any truth commission is to bring to light the violations that occurred during the period under investigation. Because more than 500 women spoke out about rape – and many, many others spoke about other types of victimization – the SLTRC's final report was able to highlight these issues and demand that they receive proper attention. In the 'Recommendations' portion of the final report, the SLTRC noted:

Women and girls in Sierra Leone continue to be the victims of sexual violence. The Commission notes that the national laws of Sierra Leone are inadequate to deal with the prosecution of crimes of sexual violence, including rape, sexual harassment and other forms of sexual abuse. The current rules of procedure and

¹⁸⁹ Ibid. p. 88.

¹⁹⁰ Truth and Reconciliation Commission, S. L. (2004). Witness to Truth: Report of the Sierra Leone Truth and Reconciliation Commission, Volume Three B. Witness to Truth: Report of the Sierra Leone Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Accra, Ghana, Sierra Leone Truth and Reconciliation Commission. **3B**: 514. Chapter 3, para 283.

¹⁹¹ (2003). "'We'll Kill You if You Cry': Sexual Violence in the Sierra Leone Conflict." Human Rights Watch 15(1): 79. p. 25.

evidence in respect of crimes of sexual violence are not only discriminatory but are also offensive to women and girls.¹⁹²

Further, the Commission recommended specific steps in order to remedy this. First, laws linking the prosecution of sexual offenses to the moral character of the complainant must be repealed. Second, that the government of Sierra Leone must harmonize its laws with those in the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, regarding the rules of evidentiary burden and the rules of procedure and evidence in respect to sexual crimes.¹⁹³ Recommendations such as these are certainly difficult to implement given Sierra Leone's recognition of customary and Islamic law. However, the recommendations also show a regard for the importance of prosecuting sexual crimes. This creates a culture of accountability in which sexual crimes are no longer acceptable – a critical step towards the prevention of such crimes.

Women Ex-Combatants and the Sierra Leone TRC

The SLTRC employed a number of tactics to encourage women to testify as victims. But what about the large number of women who were not just 'victims', but also 'perpetrators'? Women ex-combatants were severely under-represented among women who testified before the TRC – nearly absent. In the final report, the Commission recognized that it "experienced great difficulties in accessing the testimonies of women ex-combatants and collaborators", and cautions that "the plight of women ex-combatants and their families is fairly precarious".¹⁹⁴ Why did the SLTRC's gender policies fail to reach women ex-combatants?

The SLTRC blames its failure to attract women ex-combatants on the women's overwhelming fear of being discovered as ex-combatants and consequently being targeted and stigmatized by their communities and families for their participation in the conflict. Although it was comparatively easy for male ex-combatants to reintegrate into their communities, the task for

¹⁹² Truth and Reconciliation Commission, S. L. (2004). *Witness to Truth: Report of the Sierra Leone Truth and Reconciliation Commission, Volume Two. Witness to Truth: Report of the Sierra Leone Truth and Reconciliation Commission*. Accra, Ghana, Sierra Leone Truth and Reconciliation Commission. 2: 503. Chapter 3, para 330.

¹⁹³ Ibid. Chapter 3, paras 333 and 334.

¹⁹⁴ Truth and Reconciliation Commission, S. L. (2004). *Witness to Truth: Report of the Sierra Leone Truth and Reconciliation Commission, Volume Three B. Witness to Truth: Report of the Sierra Leone Truth and Reconciliation Commission*. Accra, Ghana, Sierra Leone Truth and Reconciliation Commission. 3B: 514. Chapter 3, para 410.

women remains extremely difficult. Non-disclosure of their activities is a survival mechanism, and they continue to live in fear of their former lives being discovered.¹⁹⁵ The final report's conclusion about the absence of women-ex-combatants sheds light on one of the potential reasons for their exclusion. The harsh reality of women ex-combatants' lives and the necessary secrecy of their actions in the conflict did prevent them from coming forward to the Commission. This conclusion alone, though, does not fully answer the question of why women ex-combatants did not participate in the TRC.

Unfortunately, research on women ex-combatants' participation in the TRC is sparse. There are no published studies that focus directly on women ex-combatants' experiences. The majority of information on these women comes from the Commission's final report and from indirect links to research and studies on related topics, such as women as victims and male ex-combatants. Chapter Five will share suggestions for future research on women ex-combatants and the TRC. The following section relies on existing information on their experiences with the TRC and to draw conclusions about their absence from the Commission.

Complex Identities: Blurring the Line between 'Victim' and 'Perpetrator'

The TRC, like DDR, employed a simplified understanding of a 'combatant' and tended to ignore women's experiences as such. Women ex-combatants occupied a space between 'victim' and 'perpetrator' far more frequently than male combatants and women non-combatants. The ex-combatant organization PRIDE (Post-conflict Reintegration Initiative for Development and Empowerment) went so far as to call these women "victim-perpetrators"¹⁹⁶. PRIDE emphasized the following:

More than 80 percent [of women ex-combatants interviewed] say they were forcibly conscripted. The vast majority still live with their "husbands." Over the years they have been subjected to all kinds of sexual abuse. On the other hand, there can be no doubt that they have participated in atrocities. A challenge for the TRC will be how to deal with victim-perpetrators.¹⁹⁷

¹⁹⁵ Ibid. Chapter 3, para 411.

¹⁹⁶ PRIDE (2002). Ex-Combatant Views of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and the Special Court in Sierra Leone. Freetown, Sierra Leone, The Post-conflict Reintegration Initiative for Development and Empowerment (PRIDE) and the International Center for Transitional Justice (ICTJ), p. 13.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid. p. 13

Despite this warning and all of the SLTRC's sensitivity towards special protections and policies necessary to attract women 'victims', in the end there was little thought given to special policies and protections necessary to attract women who were also 'perpetrators'. (The Commission also failed to incorporate many male victims, particularly those who had suffered sexual abuse. Victimhood, tied so closely to femininity, resulted in emasculation and ran counter to prevailing masculine identities.)

The Commission was very careful to protect female victims from men during closed hearings, but failed to consider the protection that female 'victim-perpetrators' may have needed from community members of both genders. Women ex-combatants are known to have committed human rights violations against other women.¹⁹⁸ Women ex-combatants required the utmost secrecy and security in testifying in order to keep their identities hidden from all community members. Had the Commission recognized and respected this need for complete anonymity, women ex-combatants may have turned out in higher numbers.

In its final report, the Commission did not disaggregate data on 'perpetrators' by sex, suggesting that there were too few women who testified as such to merit an investigation into their numbers. The TRC allowed statement-givers to identify themselves in more than one category: victim, perpetrator, witness, or a person making a statement on behalf of someone else. In its protocol, the Commission reminded, "It is crucial for the statement-takers to understand that the statement-giver can belong to more than one category. Indeed, many people in Sierra Leone are victims, perpetrators and witnesses at the same time."¹⁹⁹ However, the Commission did not publish information on those who identified themselves in more than one category – making it impossible to know how many 'victim-perpetrators' exist.

The TRC's outreach programs tended to target women who were *victims* and ex-combatants who were *male*. The TRC recognized the power of civil society organizations, and reached out to local women's groups and activist organizations, as well as the country's primary ex-combatant

¹⁹⁸ (2003). "'We'll Kill You if You Cry': Sexual Violence in the Sierra Leone Conflict." Human Rights Watch 15(1): 79. p. 41.

¹⁹⁹ Truth and Reconciliation Commission, S. L. (2004). Witness to Truth: Report of the Sierra Leone Truth and Reconciliation Commission, Volume One. Witness to Truth: Report of the Sierra Leone Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Accra, Ghana, Sierra Leone Truth and Reconciliation Commission. 1: 247. Chapter 5, p. 186.

group, PRIDE. The Commission sensitized these organizations to the goals of the TRC and asked for help and advice. In return, the TRC received tremendous support for its activities from many Sierra Leonean women's groups and from PRIDE. Unfortunately, the focus of the women's organizations was largely on 'victim' participation, not on women ex-combatants; PRIDE is largely focused on assisting male ex-combatants.²⁰⁰

The TRC missed out on what it admitted would have been "a unique opportunity to understand fully the role played by women in the war"²⁰¹. Its neglect of women ex-combatants further exemplifies the need for post-conflict societies to broaden their understanding of ex-combatants' identities and roles to include those who occupy non-tradition spaces.

Prioritizing 'Victims'

Like DDR, the TRC also undervalued the participation of ex-combatants, particularly women ex-combatants. In a study of ex-combatants views of the TRC, published in 2002 PRIDE and the ICTJ, the organizations warned that the participation of ex-combatants would be critical to the success of the TRC. The study also emphasized that "the TRC could create vital opportunities for ex-combatants to return to their communities and thus would reduce the dangerous concentrations of ex-combatants in a few volatile areas"²⁰². The TRC could thus extend the work of reintegration far beyond the reach of DDR, facilitating the return of ex-combatants by allowing them to speak out about their actions. Although the majority of ex-combatants did not identify themselves as 'perpetrators', many expressed the desire to apologize to their communities for their actions, suggesting their loose connection to the term.²⁰³

²⁰⁰ PRIDE (2002). Ex-Combatant Views of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and the Special Court in Sierra Leone. Freetown, Sierra Leone, The Post-conflict Reintegration Initiative for Development and Empowerment (PRIDE) and the International Center for Transitional Justice (ICTJ). and Nowrojee, B. (2005). "Making the Invisible War Crime Visible: Post-Conflict Justice for Sierra Leone's Rape Victims." Harvard Human Rights Journal(18).

²⁰¹ Truth and Reconciliation Commission, S. L. (2004). Witness to Truth: Report of the Sierra Leone Truth and Reconciliation Commission, Volume Three B. Witness to Truth: Report of the Sierra Leone Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Accra, Ghana, Sierra Leone Truth and Reconciliation Commission. **3B**: 514. Chapter 3, para 412.

²⁰² PRIDE (2002). Ex-Combatant Views of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and the Special Court in Sierra Leone. Freetown, Sierra Leone, The Post-conflict Reintegration Initiative for Development and Empowerment (PRIDE) and the International Center for Transitional Justice (ICTJ).p. 12.

²⁰³ Ibid. p. 12.

The TRC faced serious difficulty attracting the participation of ex-combatant perpetrators, regardless of gender. In the final report, the Commission admitted, “Perpetrators were reticent to talk to the Commission for various reasons”²⁰⁴. Chief among these reasons was a misguided, yet prevalent, fear among ex-combatants that their testimonies would be used against them by the Special Court for Sierra Leone (SCSL)²⁰⁵. The SCSL is a hybrid court, run by the United Nations and the government of Sierra Leone, to prosecute those most responsible for human rights violations during the conflict. The court, which was originally set to expire in 2007 but still ongoing, is trying only ten men.²⁰⁶ All but the most heinous perpetrators of human rights violations had been granted amnesty from prosecution through the Lomé Accord. Thus, for the vast majority of low-level perpetrators, a fear of the SCSL was uncalled for. Nonetheless, misinformation about the powers of the SLTRC and the SCSL abounded, and discouraged many of those who had perpetrated crimes from testifying before the SLTRC.

The final report explains how the Commission embarked on a sensitization campaign with PRIDE to increase awareness about the TRC among ex-combatants. For three weeks in March 2003, statement takers and PRIDE employees traveled to areas with high concentrations of ex-combatants. They conducted sensitization sessions, which were followed immediately by statement taking.²⁰⁷ In a PRIDE study, 81 percent of women interviewed had not heard of the TRC before the sensitization campaign – showing just how important the sensitization was.²⁰⁸ The Commission’s final report does not indicate that separate sensitizations were held for women, or the number of statement-takers on this campaign who were women. Experiences with DDR show that women ex-combatants are reluctant to enter into spaces where male ex-combatants may be present. Further inquiry is required to determine if the TRC took steps to ensure that sensitization for women ex-combatants was conducted in an environment safe from

²⁰⁴ Truth and Reconciliation Commission, S. L. (2004). *Witness to Truth: Report of the Sierra Leone Truth and Reconciliation Commission, Volume One. Witness to Truth: Report of the Sierra Leone Truth and Reconciliation Commission*. Accra, Ghana, Sierra Leone Truth and Reconciliation Commission. 1: 247. Chapter 4, para 123.

²⁰⁵ Ibid. Chapter 4, para 123.

²⁰⁶ . "The Special Court for Sierra Leone." Retrieved 28 January 2008, from <http://www.sc-sl.org/index.html>.

²⁰⁷ Truth and Reconciliation Commission, S. L. (2004). *Witness to Truth: Report of the Sierra Leone Truth and Reconciliation Commission, Volume One. Witness to Truth: Report of the Sierra Leone Truth and Reconciliation Commission*. Accra, Ghana, Sierra Leone Truth and Reconciliation Commission. 1: 247. Chapter 5, para 123.

²⁰⁸ PRIDE (2002). *Ex-Combatant Views of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and the Special Court in Sierra Leone*. Freetown, Sierra Leone, The Post-conflict Reintegration Initiative for Development and Empowerment (PRIDE) and the International Center for Transitional Justice (ICTJ). p. 43.

threatening men. The Commission's admission that it "experienced great difficulties in accessing the testimonies of women ex-combatants and collaborators"²⁰⁹ though, is perhaps telling of a sensitization campaign for ex-combatants that failed to incorporate women.

The TRC's campaign among ex-combatants attempted to sort out the confusion over the TRC and the powers of the Special Court. Still, the campaign lasted only three weeks – confirming that the participation of ex-combatants was not a top priority for the Commission, which held hearings for nearly four months. Further evidence lies in the statistical appendix to the TRC's final report²¹⁰. These statistics show the types of abuses that victims endured and at the hands of which armed group, and the victims' ages, genders and ethnicities. The Commission does not reveal the age, ethnicity or gender of perpetrators. Nor does it disclose a total number of statement-givers who identified themselves as 'perpetrators'. This information is critical to understanding the identity and motivation of those who committed atrocities, as well as how to successfully work towards reintegrating them.

The Feminine Ideal as a Nation-building Tool

The Sierra Leone TRC was heavily invested in creating a new national identity based on a common understanding of the conflict. The final report observed that, "a nation's unity depends on a shared identity, which in turn depends largely on a shared memory"²¹¹. Like many commissions charged with creating a new national identity, the SLTRC frequently played upon the feminine ideal of women as victims and peacemakers. Women ex-combatants were excluded and devalued in this process because they did not align with the Commission's understanding of femininity.

The final report highlights women's position as victims: among its recommendations, the TRC asked that the President, as the "Father of the Nation", apologize to the women and girls of

²⁰⁹ Truth and Reconciliation Commission, S. L. (2004). *Witness to Truth: Report of the Sierra Leone Truth and Reconciliation Commission, Volume Three B. Witness to Truth: Report of the Sierra Leone Truth and Reconciliation Commission*. Accra, Ghana, Sierra Leone Truth and Reconciliation Commission. **3B**: 514. Chapter 3, para 410.

²¹⁰ Conibere, R., J. Asher, et al. Ibid. Statistical Appendix to the Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Sierra Leone. B. T. Human Rights Data Analysis Group, Inc. Palo Alto, California.

²¹¹ Truth and Reconciliation Commission, S. L. Ibid. *Witness to Truth: Report of the Sierra Leone Truth and Reconciliation Commission, Volume One*. Accra, Ghana. **1**: 247. Chapter 3, para 32.

Sierra Leone for the abuses they suffered during the conflict²¹². The report also acknowledges women's actions as peacemakers, which "played a major role in ensuring that the conflict in Sierra Leone came to an end"²¹³. Women's actions as combatants and perpetrators are mentioned infrequently, and always as an aberration to the norm: "The conflict has shown that while women are predominantly victims, they also play the roles of perpetrators and collaborators to armed groups"²¹⁴. While there is nothing incorrect about the previous statement, it exemplifies how women ex-combatants are portrayed as an anomaly to the feminine discourse of victimhood.

The feminization of victimhood was also evident in the South African TRC, where *ubuntu*, the term to describe human interconnectivity and to encourage reconciliation and forgiveness, was most often ascribed to women.²¹⁵ Anthropologist Fiona Ross also noted the desire of the South African TRC to portray women as passive victims, rather than actors.²¹⁶ The Sierra Leone TRC, although in many ways more effective than the South African TRC at investigating women's experiences, showed a similar desire to create a national identity based on a femininity that ran counter to the experiences of women ex-combatants.

The Potential Contributions of Women Ex-Combatants

The TRC failed to capture the enormous potential of women ex-combatants to contribute to the peacebuilding process. Already excluded from DDR, these women were struggling to return to their communities while keeping their identities as combatants hidden. Through the TRC, women ex-combatants could have received encouragement and counseling on reintegration. Instead, as indicated in the previous chapter, many women ex-combatants continue to live on the

²¹² Truth and Reconciliation Commission, S. L. (2004). Witness to Truth: Report of the Sierra Leone Truth and Reconciliation Commission, Volume Two. Witness to Truth: Report of the Sierra Leone Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Accra, Ghana, Sierra Leone Truth and Reconciliation Commission. 2: 503. Chapter 2, para 317.

²¹³ Truth and Reconciliation Commission, S. L. (2004). Witness to Truth: Report of the Sierra Leone Truth and Reconciliation Commission, Volume Three B. Witness to Truth: Report of the Sierra Leone Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Accra, Ghana, Sierra Leone Truth and Reconciliation Commission. 3B: 514. Chapter 3, para 428.

²¹⁴ Ibid. Chapter 3, para 423.

²¹⁵ Driver, D. (2005). "Truth, Reconciliation and Gender: the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission and Black Women's Intellectual History." Australian Feminist Studies 20(47): 219-229.

²¹⁶ Ross, F. (2002). Bearing Witness: Women and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa. London, Pluto Press.

margins of society, eking out an existence through prostitution and other criminal activities. Their actions contribute to the spread of HIV/AIDS and to the continuing cycle of poverty.

Beyond the TRC's potential to assist in reintegration, it also had the power to incorporate these women's stories and experiences into the national identity. With proper sensitization and promises of anonymity and protection, women ex-combatants may have been willing to testify before the Commission. Even keeping their identities hidden, the women could have exposed their stories to the nation. Instead of sharing women ex-combatants' narratives in the final report, the Commission is forced to admit repeatedly that, "women ex-combatants did not turn out in large numbers"²¹⁷, or that "it experienced great difficulties in accessing the testimonies of women ex-combatants and collaborators"²¹⁸. Without knowledge of these women's experiences, the Commission was unable to make a single recommendation to the government about relieving their plight.

Conclusions

The Sierra Leone TRC, armed with gender policies that were highly evolved and well implemented, still failed to attract the participation of women ex-combatants. Upon examination, the reasons behind women ex-combatant's exclusion from the TRC appear to mirror those discussed in Chapter Three in relation to DDR. The TRC employed a simplified understanding of a 'combatant' and tended to ignore women's experiences as such. The TRC also underestimated the potential of 'perpetrators' to contribute to the truth-telling, reconciliation process and further ignored women 'perpetrators' because they did not align with the TRC's feminine discourse. As a result, the TRC failed to reach out to women ex-combatants and provide them with the protections and policies they required in order to participate.

Current and future truth commissions must recognize the power of women ex-combatants to contribute to peacebuilding, and the necessity of their participation. The Truth and

²¹⁷ Truth and Reconciliation Commission, S. L. (2004). Witness to Truth: Report of the Sierra Leone Truth and Reconciliation Commission, Volume Three B. Witness to Truth: Report of the Sierra Leone Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Accra, Ghana, Sierra Leone Truth and Reconciliation Commission. **3B**: 514. Chapter 3, para 22.

²¹⁸ Ibid. Chapter 3, para 410.

Reconciliation Commission of Liberia, which began in 2006 and is scheduled to close in June 2008, is one such commission. The Liberia TRC must take steps to ensure the participation of women ex-combatants, as they made up 20 percent of the armed forces in the conflict there. The Liberia TRC has promised to implement “special programs for children and women both as perpetrators and victims”²¹⁹, but has yet to comment on the success of these programs. Chapter Five will include recommendations to future truth commissions on what such programming might entail.

²¹⁹ (2008). "Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Liberia." 2008, from www.trcofliberia.org.

Chapter Five: Conclusions and Recommendations

The information in the previous four chapters has shown conclusively that women ex-combatants were excluded from peacebuilding mechanisms in Sierra Leone. An analysis of this ex-combatants' exclusion showed that those charged with planning and implementing DDR and the truth commission did not understand women ex-combatants' roles in the conflict, and devalued their potential contributions to the peacebuilding process. The thesis further showed the detrimental effects that these misconceptions had on the lives and well being of women ex-combatants and their dependents and peacebuilding in Sierra Leone in general. Chapter Five will share a number of important suggestions for further research on the subject and outline some recommendations to future DDR programs and truth commissions. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the links between DDR and truth commissions and the potential gains that individual peacebuilding mechanisms could make through greater cooperation.

Recommendations for Further Research and Analysis

In recent years, women ex-combatants' participation in DDR programs has come to the attention of the international peacebuilding community through a number of important and revealing studies on the topic. Researchers such as Vanessa Farr, Dyan Mazurana, Kristopher Carlson and Susan MacKay have contributed immensely to knowledge on women ex-combatants.²²⁰ Their research reports provided much of the information shared in Chapter Three on DDR. Their work also inspired many of the policy changes adapted by more recent DDR programs, such the DDR program in Liberia.

Despite the attention to women ex-combatants' participation in DDR, women ex-combatants' participation in truth commissions is an area that remains largely un-researched and un-

²²⁰ See: Mazurana, D. and K. Carlson (2004). *From Combat to Community: Women and Girls of Sierra Leone*. S. N. Anderlini, *Women Waging Peace and The Policy Commission*: 46.

MacKay, S. and D. Mazurana (2004). *Where are the Girls? Girls in Fighting Forces in Northern Uganda, Sierra Leone and Mozambique: Their Lives During and After War*. Montreal, International Center for Human Rights and Democratic Governance: 75.

And Farr, V. (2002). *Gendering Demilitarization as a Peacebuilding Tool*. Bonn, Bonn International Center for Conversion: 49.

discussed. To date there are no published studies on women ex-combatants' participation in the Sierra Leone TRC. Studies on women ex-combatants and other truth commissions are nearly as difficult to come by. Even books focused entirely on a gender analysis of a truth commission, such as Fiona Ross' *Bearing Witness: Women and the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission*²²¹, barely mention women ex-combatants' experiences. This dearth of information is one that must be remedied in order to identify specific areas for action.

An important first step would be a study similar to Mazurana and Carlson's work on DDR, "Women and Girls: From Combat to Community in Sierra Leone", to be performed in relation to women ex-combatants' experiences with the TRC. Interviews with women ex-combatants will show conclusively their reasons for not becoming involved. This information is crucial to improving the mechanism in other countries and addressing the ongoing problems these women face in Sierra Leone. Policy makers must understand the reasoning that drives women ex-combatants in order to address their fears and concerns.

Further investigation into the Sierra Leone TRC's ex-combatant policy is another key that may lead to a breakthrough. The Commission is vague on the details of its ex-combatant sensitization campaign in its final report. There has been little inquiry into its semi-apparent lack of interest in ex-combatants of both genders.

Recommendations for Policy Advances

There have been notable advances made in gender policy and programming for peacebuilding mechanisms over the past several decades. DDR policies have become particularly geared towards women's participation, as noted in Chapter Three in the section on DDR in Liberia. Truth commissions have begun to recognize the power and potential that women have to contribute by sharing their stories and experiences. It is only through the tireless efforts of feminist academics, advocates and activists at all levels – grassroots to international – that these remarkable changes have been made. The United Nations passed Security Council Resolution

²²¹ Ross, F. (2002). *Bearing Witness: Women and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa*. London, Pluto Press.

1325 on Women, Peace and Security in 2000²²². The Resolution, although far reaching in its goals and well intended, has no enforcement mechanism. Sadly, it has been left up to interested parties to ensure that the Resolution is upheld. It is a testament to the strength and power of the feminist community that it has been able to use Resolution 1325 to call the United Nations and its partner governments to account on many occasions.

Recommendations: Women Ex-Combatants and DDR

As illustrated in Chapter Three through the examples of Mozambique and Liberia, there have been a number of advances over the years in DDR programming as regards women ex-combatants. Phase III of disarmament in Sierra Leone, which allowed for a group to turn in a single weapon, marked a turning point in the recognition of the differing identities and needs women combatants. DDR in Liberia, although making improvements over Sierra Leone in the incorporation of women combatants, still shows that significant room for improvement remains. Many gender best-practices may be relevant across borders and over time, but DDR coordinators should consult with local civil society groups to ensure the sensitivity and necessity of these practices. Most importantly, positive improvements in DDR policies must be carried over into practice with the help of gender advisers and the cooperation and support of women's organizations. A UNIFEM Mission to Liberia in 2003 found that women combatants often felt more comfortable turning in weapons to local women's groups than to peacekeeping personnel.²²³ Utilizing information such as this and strengthening the role that outside NGOs play in DDR programming can help to better include women in the process.

Recommendations: Women Ex-combatants and Truth Commissions

Feminist academics, advocates and activists must put pressure on governments and international organizations to create policies for truth commissions that are inclusive of women ex-combatants. First, scholars must remedy the lack of available feminist research on women ex-combatants' involvement in truth commissions, as discussed above. The current dearth of

²²² Council, U. N. S. (2000). Resolution 1325. New York, United Nations.

²²³ Douglas, S., V. Farr, et al. (2004). *Getting it Right, Doing it Right: Gender and Demobilization, Disarmament and Reintegration*. S. Douglas and F. Hill. New York, United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM). p. 19.

research shows that even gender-aware research on truth commissions is focusing on women as victims and not as more complex social actors. Feminist scholars must be the first to broaden their own ideas and writings on women's roles in conflict, and expand them to meet the demands of reality. Gender advisers and advocates must reexamine the direction of their work to account for women ex-combatants and women perpetrators in truth commissions.

The lack of research and policy on women ex-combatants and truth commissions provides ample space for suggested improvements. First, future truth commissions must work harder than the Sierra Leone TRC at gathering testimonies from ex-combatants, regardless of gender. The Sierra Leone TRC made a step in the right direction by launching a sensitization campaign to increase awareness among ex-combatants. A study done by the ex-combatant group, PRIDE, showed that prior to sensitization, only 72 percent of respondents had heard of the TRC and 41 percent were willing to give a statement. After sensitization, 60 percent of respondents reported that they were willing to give a statement.²²⁴ The Sierra Leone TRC, which reported serious difficulty in attracting the participation of ex-combatants, would have benefited from a prolonged and intense awareness campaign, rather than its three-week effort.

Having suggested a sensitization campaign, it is important to emphasize the critical nature of gender-sensitive policies for such work. As mentioned in the previous chapter, only 19 percent of women ex-combatants had heard of the TRC prior to their attendance at a sensitization workshop.²²⁵ Given such statistics, and the weak attempt the TRC made to sensitize ex-combatants, it is no wonder that the Commission had trouble attracting women ex-combatants to testify. Women ex-combatants were reluctant to attend a DDR program where they might have been exposed to male ex-combatants. It follows logically that women ex-combatants would also be reluctant to attend a TRC sensitization workshop where they might face male ex-combatants. Truth commissions must provide women ex-combatants with an environment safe and secure from potentially threatening men. Sensitization campaigns must also be sure to travel to areas

²²⁴ PRIDE (2002). *Ex-Combatant Views of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and the Special Court in Sierra Leone*. Freetown, Sierra Leone, The Post-conflict Reintegration Initiative for Development and Empowerment (PRIDE) and the International Center for Transitional Justice (ICTJ). pp. 43 and 45.

²²⁵ Ibid. p. 43

where women ex-combatants live – which may not be the same areas where male ex-combatants are located.

Truth commissions must also provide women ex-combatants with the privacy and anonymity they require – which often includes privacy from other women. The Sierra Leone TRC allowed women to testify in private and also held a closed hearing in each district, where women could testify before other women. The Commission might have benefited from holding closed hearings where only women ex-combatants could be present. Truth commissions are meant to be cathartic for those involved, and women ex-combatants could have profited from sharing their stories with one another, even if they were not ready to share them with the public.

Linking DDR and the TRC

Women ex-combatants' experiences with DDR and the TRC in Sierra Leone have shown a pattern of exclusion based on misunderstandings of their role in the conflict and an underestimation of their potential to contribute to, and gain from, the peacebuilding mechanisms. These links emphasize the failure of both mechanisms to capture a valuable resource for peace. More positively, though, the mechanisms are also linked by their goal of creating sustainable peace, their target population, and their timeframe. For this reason, peacebuilding mechanisms should be conceptualized more holistically. At present, the International Center for Transitional Justice is commissioning a study of the nexus between DDR and transitional justice. The forthcoming publication should shed light on a number of ways in which increased cooperation between peacebuilding mechanisms could improve their work as a whole.

One specific way that a DDR program and truth commission could better work with one another is to pool their valuable knowledge and resources on women ex-combatants' location and reintegration needs. Both mechanisms share the goal of reintegrating ex-combatants into their communities. A gender-effective DDR program would have knowledge of women ex-combatants' locations, as well as experience in handling their needs for trauma counseling and reintegration support. This information would be invaluable to a truth commission that places a premium on women ex-combatants' participation. In societies where these women are so

marginalized that they often seem to disappear, and are rarely represented by civil society organizations vocalizing their needs, a successful DDR program would be able to share extremely useful information with a truth commission. In return, a DDR program's responsibility to reintegrate of ex-combatants would be shared with the truth commission. Understanding the potential gains of sharing knowledge and resources, is seems almost absurd such a partnership is not the norm.

Conclusions

By incorporating women ex-combatants into their work, DDR programs and truth commissions can help to make these women's narratives a part of the national history and identity. Furthermore, acknowledging these women's active roles during the conflict can help to decrease their marginalization and open up alternative roles for all women in the post-conflict society. Recognition of women's agency is important at every step of the peacebuilding process, from the creation of a peace treaty through to the final stages of reconciliation. Women *and* men in post-conflict societies would benefit from inclusive peacebuilding – a peacebuilding process that recognizes the needs of only the male half of the population is bound to fail everyone.

Sierra Leone's failure to transform gender-relations is evident in a simple overview of Sierra Leonean politics, education and health care today. The 2004 UN Human Development Index ranked Sierra Leone 176 out of 177 countries for gender development.²²⁶ Women have 14.5 percent representation in parliament, and only 24.4 percent of adult women are literate.²²⁷ According to a national survey in 2000, only 54 percent of women age 15-49 have ever heard of HIV/AIDS. In the north areas, this figure is 18 percent. The *en masse* exclusion of women ex-combatants from DDR programming and the TRC is not to blame for these astonishing statistics. Rather, the numbers show that the peacebuilding mechanisms did not properly take advantage of their opportunity to change the status quo.

²²⁶ UNDP. (2006). "United Nations Development Index." Retrieved 9 January, 2008, from http://hdrstats.undp.org/countries/country_fact_sheets/cty_fs_SLE.html.

²²⁷ (2000). The Status of Women and Children in Sierra Leone: A Household Survey Report, Central Statistics Office and the Ministry of Development and Economic Planning.

For better or worse, women are taking on roles in conflict that had previously been the reserve of men. The conflict in Sierra Leone is only one example among many in which women were involved as combatants and perpetrators. The losses that Sierra Leone suffered as a result of excluding these women ex-combatants from peacebuilding ought to serve as a warning to other countries emerging from conflict not to do the same. Women ex-combatants have the same potential to contribute to peacebuilding as they did to the perpetuation of the conflict. They are not only passive victims. They are actors, survivors, perpetrators, collaborators and peacebuilders.

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